

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SQUIRE'S TRIBULATION.

WHAT more thankless office is there than to be the bearer of ill news to those we love or regard? Not often in the course of his life had such a duty fallen to the lot of Tom Bristow, and never had the burden seemed so heavy as on this present occasion. Hewould gladly have given a very fair share of all that he was worth could he but have turned his ill news into good news, or else have imposed upon some one else the telling of those evil tidings of which he was the bearer. From London he had sent a carefully worded telegram to the Squire, which the latter would know how to interpret, hoping thereby to break in some measure the force of the blow which nothing could much longer avert.

When, on his return to Pincote, Tom was ushered into the Squire's room, he found the old man, to all appearance, very much better in health than when he had left him. Mental anxiety had gone a very long way towards curing, for the time being, the physical ills from which he had been suffering. He held out his hand, and gave a long, searching look into Tom's face.

"All gone?" he whispered.

"Yes—all gone," answered Tom.

He gripped Tom's hand very hard. "I did not think it was quite so bad as that," he said. "Not quite. My poor Jenny! My poor little girl! What is to become of her after I'm gone? And Bird, too! The confidence I had in that villain!" He sighed deeply, dropped Tom's hand, and shut his eyes for a few moments, as if in pain.

"You will stay to dinner," he said, presently.

"If you will excuse me to-day——" began Tom.

"But I won't excuse you, sir. Why on earth should I?" he answered, with a flash of his old irritability. "The old house is not good enough for you, I suppose, now you know it holds nothing but paupers."

"Thank you, sir : I will stay to dinner," said Tom, quietly.

"It will be a charity to Jenny, too," added the Squire. "She's been moped up indoors, without a soul to speak to, for I don't know how long. And it's more than a month since she heard from young Cope—his letters must have miscarried, you know—and I'm afraid that's preying on her mind ; and so you had better keep her company to-day."

Tom needed no further pressing, we may be sure. He smiled grimly to himself at the idea of Edward Cope's long silence being a matter of distress to Jane. He rose to go.

"Just ring that bell, will you?" said the Squire. "And sit down again for another minute or two. There's something I wanted to say to you, but I can't call to mind what it is just now."

Jane answered the bell in person. She gave Tom her hand in silence, but there was a world of meaning in her eyes as she did so.

"My dear, I wish you would see whether Ridley is anywhere about, and send word that I want to see him. What do you think the villain has done?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, papa."

"Why, he's planted a lot of white hyacinths along with the purple ones in your poor mother's favourite bed opposite the dressing-room window, when he knows very well that I never have any but purple ones there. She never had any but purple ones, and I never will. The scoundrel deserves to be well horsewhipped. I'll discharge him on the spot ! I swear I will."

"I will tell him to come and see you," said Jane, calmly. She knew of old that her father's bark was worse than his bite, and that he had no more real intention of discharging Ridley than he had of flying to the moon.

"And now, if you will just give orders to have the basket-carriage brought round, I shall be glad, dear. I feel wonderfully better to-day, and I think a drive would do me good."

"But would Dr. Davidson approve of your going out to-day, papa?"

"Hang Dr. Davidson ! I'm not his slave, am I ? I tell you that I feel very much better ; and, to get out, if only for half an hour, will make me better still."

"Then you will let me go with you?" said Jane.

"Nothing of the kind. I've a great deal to think about while I'm out, and I want to be alone. Besides, I've asked Bristow to stay to dinner, and you must do your best to entertain him."

"If you go out, papa, I shall go with you," said Jane, in her straight-

forward, positive way. "Besides which, Briggs is ill to-day, and there's nobody to drive you—unless you will let Mr. Bristow be your coachman for once, and then we shall all be together."

With some difficulty the Squire was induced to consent to this arrangement. It was evident that he would have preferred to go out alone, but that was just what Jane would by no means allow him to do. Her woman's instinct told her that they were in the midst of a thunder-cloud, but where and when the lightning would strike she could not even guess. In any case, it seemed to her well that for some time to come her father should be left alone as little as possible.

So they drove out together, all three of them. The Squire was unusually silent, but did not otherwise seem different from his ordinary mood, and neither Tom nor Jane was much inclined for talking. On the road they found a child of six, a little girl who had wandered away from home and lost herself, who was sitting by the roadside crying bitterly. The Squire would have the child on his knee, although she was neither very neatly dressed nor very pretty. He kissed her, and soothed away her tears, and made her laugh, and found out where she lived. Then, in a little while, still sitting on his knee, she fell asleep, and the old man wrapped the thickest rug around her, and sheltered her from the cold as tenderly as though she had been his own child. And when the girl's mother was found, and the girl herself had to be given up, he made her kiss him, and put half-a-crown into her hand, and promised to call and see her in a day or two. Tom, watching him narrowly all the time, said to himself: "I don't understand him at all to-day. I thought my news would have overwhelmed him, but it seems to have had far less effect upon him than it had upon me. I'm fairly puzzled." But there are some troubles so overwhelming that, for a time at least, they numb and deaden the feelings by their very intensity. All the more painful is the after-waking.

"I think, dear, that I will go and lie down for a little while," said the Squire, when they had reached home. "You will wake me up in time for dinner."

But there was Blenkinsop, his steward, waiting by appointment, who wanted his signature to the renewal of a lease.

"Yes, yes, to be sure, Blenkinsop," said the Squire, in his old business-like way, as he sat down at his writing-table and spread out the paper before him and dipped his pen in the ink. Then he paused.

"Just your name, sir, nothing more—on that line," said the steward deferentially, marking the place with his finger.

"Just so, Blenkinsop, just so," said the Squire, tremulously. "But what is my name? Just for the moment I don't seem as if I could recollect it."

A look of horror flashed from Jane's eyes into the eyes of Tom.

She was by her father's side in a moment. He looked helplessly up at her, and tried to smile, but his lips quivered and tears stood in his eyes.

"What is it, dear?" she said, as she stooped and pressed her lips to his forehead.

"I want to sign this lease, and for the life of me I can't recollect my own name."

"Titus Culpepper, dear," she whispered in his ear.

"Of course. What an idiot I must be!" he exclaimed with a laugh, as he dashed off the name in his usual rapid style, and ended with a bigger flourish than usual.

"Won't you go to bed, papa?" said Jane, insinuatingly, as soon as Blenkinsop was gone. "You will rest so much better there, you know."

"Go to bed at this time of day, indeed! What are you thinking about? No, I'll just have a little snooze on the sofa—nothing more. And be sure you wake me up in time for dinner."

In less than two minutes he had gone off to sleep, as calmly and quietly as any little child. Jane rejoined Tom in the drawing-room.

"I am afraid that papa has heard some very bad news, Mr. Bristow," she said.

"Yes, and I was the unfortunate bearer of it," answered Tom.

"He sent you to London the other day to make certain private inquiries for him?"

"He did."

"And the ill news you brought this morning is the result of those inquiries?"

"It is."

There was a pause, which Tom was the first to break. "I think it only right, Miss Culpepper," he said, "that you should be made acquainted with the nature of the business which took me to London. You have no brother, and I know that you have had the practical management of many of your father's affairs for a long time. It is only right that you should know."

"But I would rather not know, Mr. Bristow, if you think that papa would prefer, in the slightest degree, that I should not be told."

"I think it highly desirable that you should be told," said Tom. "No doubt Mr. Culpepper himself will tell you everything before long."

"I am not so sure on that point," interrupted Jane. "As regards his pecuniary affairs, I know little or nothing, although I have long had my suspicions that there was something wrong somewhere."

"In these matters there should be nothing hidden from you—at least not now; and I will take on myself the responsibility of telling you all that I know. Should Mr. Culpepper himself tell you sub-

sequently, there will be no harm done, while you will have had time to think the matter over, and will be better able to advise him as to what might be done under the circumstances. Should he not choose to tell you, I still maintain that it will be better, both for himself and for you, that you should rest in ignorance no longer."

Tom then told her all about his visit to London, its object, and its result.

"Thank heaven that it's nothing more serious than the loss of a few thousand pounds!" said Jane, with an air of relief when Tom had done. "Papa will soon get over that, and we shall be as happy again as ever we have been."

"I am by no means certain that Mr. Culpepper will get over it as easily as you seem to imagine," said Tom, gravely. "I suspect that the entire savings of many years have gone in this crash; and that alone, to a man of your father's time of life, is something very serious indeed."

"Don't think, Mr. Bristow, that I want to make too light of the loss," said Jane, earnestly. "Still, after all, it is nothing but money."

Her spirits had risen wonderfully during the last few minutes, and she could not help showing it. "Dinner will be ready in half an hour," she added. "I will go and see whether papa is awake."

Presently she came back. "He is still fast asleep," she said.

"I think I would not disturb him, if I were you," said Tom. "Sleep, just now, is his best medicine."

As the Squire still slept on, they dined alone, and alone they spent the evening together. They talked of a thousand things, and they seemed to have a thousand more to talk about when the time for parting had come. This evening Tom seemed to care no longer about hiding his feelings. He sat nearer to Jane, he bent more closely over her at the piano; once or twice his lips seemed to touch her hair lightly, but she was not quite sure on the point, and consequently did not care to reprove him. His eyes sought hers more persistently and boldly than they had ever done before, and beneath those ardent glances her own eyes fell, troubled and confused.

When it was time to go, Jane went with him to the door. Said Tom as he stood on the threshold, hat in hand, "Should Mr. Culpepper speak to you about what I have told you this evening, and should he seem at all troubled in his mind about it, will you kindly suggest that he should send for me? It may seem rather conceited on my part to ask you to do this, but as your father has honoured me by taking me into his confidence so far, there can be no harm in my expressing a hope that he will do so still further. It may be in my power to help him through his difficulties, or, at least, through part of them."

"You are very kind," said Jane, with tears in her eyes, as she pressed his hand gratefully.

"And now—good night," said Tom.

Still holding her hand, he looked earnestly into her face. They were standing together just under the hall lamp, and every shade of expression was plainly visible. Her eyes met his for a moment. He read something there—I know not what—that emboldened him. His arm stole round her waist. He pressed her unresisting form to his heart. His lips touched hers for one brief instant. It was the first kiss of love. "Good night, my darling," he whispered; and almost before Jane knew what had befallen her, he was gone.

Her father being still asleep, Jane, all in a sweet confusion, took her work upstairs, and sat down by the dressing-room fire to wait till he should awake. But he still slept on, and by-and-by it grew late, so she sent the servants to bed, and made up her mind to sit by his side till morning. Just then nothing could have been more grateful to her. No thought of sleep would be possible to her for hours to come. She wanted to think over the events of that wonderful evening—to think over them in silence and alone. The time to analyse her feelings had not yet come: she did not care to make the attempt: she only wanted to realize quietly to herself the one sweet blissful fact, that she was loved, and by the one person in the whole world to whom her own heart could be given in return. What happy thoughts nestled round her young heart in the midnight quietude of the old house! "He loves me!" she whispered to herself. But the night wind, listening at the window, caught the syllables and whispered them back, and then rushed gleefully away to tell the trees and the flowers, that began already to feel the warmth of spring in their veins, and the little birds sleeping cosily in their nests beneath the winter moon, and Jane's secret was a secret no longer.

It was nearly three o'clock when the Squire woke up from his long sleep. It was a minute or two before he could collect his thoughts and call to mind all that had happened.

"You are no better than a little simpleton for sitting up," he said gruffly. "As if I couldn't take care of myself when I awoke!" Then he drew her on to his knee and kissed her tenderly. "Get me some bread and cheese and ale," he said. "I'll have supper and breakfast in one."

"Won't you have something different from bread and cheese, papa?" she asked. "There is some game pie and ——"

"No, nothing but bread and cheese," he said, gloomily. "That seems about the only thing I shall be able to afford in time to come."

So Jane went down into the lower part of the house and brought up some bread and cheese and ale; but she brought some game pie also, and when she put a plateful of the latter article before her father, he ate it without a word, and without seeming to know what it was he was eating. He did not speak another word till he had done.

"Jenny, you are a clever girl," he said abruptly, at last, "but do you think you are clever enough to earn your own living?"

Jane laughed. "Your question is rather a strange one," she said. "I will answer it as a woman answers most questions—by asking another. Why do you ask me?"

"Because if I were to die to-morrow, or next month, or next year, that is certainly what you would have to do."

"And I don't doubt my ability to do it," said Jane, with spirit. "Only, papa, you are not going to die either next month, or next year, so that the subject is one which we need not discuss further."

"But it is a subject that must be discussed, and discussed very fully, too. Jane, my girl, you are a pauper, neither more nor less than a pauper!" He spoke in a dry, harsh voice, as if he had made up his mind that his emotion should on no account over-master him.

"Well, papa dear, even if such be the case, I don't suppose that either you or I will love each other any the less on that account."

"That is not the question, girl. It was always one of my dearest hopes to give you fifteen or twenty thousand on your wedding day. In trying to turn that fifteen into fifty thousand, I have lost every penny of it, and in so doing I have altogether ruined your prospects in life."

"I can't see that at all, papa. What you did you did for the best, and if I ever do get married, I hope to marry some one who will love me for myself alone, and not for any money I might take with me."

"Very pretty, and very sentimental," said the Squire, gruffly, "but confounded rubbish for all that. And how hard on young Cope! He will be quite justified in breaking off the engagement."

"What a splendid opportunity Mr. Cope will now have for proving the sincerity of his affection!" said Jane, with a little contemptuous curl of the lip.

"You are talking rank nonsense, Janet. Edward Cope loves you; there's no doubt of that; but his father will never consent to his marrying a beggar, which is just about what you are at the present moment; and Edward has been too well brought up to go in opposition to his father. I confess it will be a great disappointment to me."

"But none to me, papa dear!" cried Jane, impulsively, as she flung her arms round her father's neck and kissed him—"no disappointment to me! Rather let us call it a happy release."

"I don't understand you," said the old man, as he took her by the shoulders and gazed into her face. "I thought you loved Edward Cope as much as he loved you. You don't mean to tell me that I have been mistaken."

"There has been a mistake somewhere, papa," faltered Jane, as she drew one of his arms round her neck, and nestled her head on his shoulder. "I—I almost fancy that it must have been on my side. I allowed myself to drift into an engagement with Mr. Cope almost without

knowing what I was about. I liked Mr. Cope very well, and I thought that I could be happy as his wife, but I have found out my mistake since then. For me to marry Mr. Cope would be to condemn myself to a life of hopeless misery. I could never love him, papa, as a wife ought to love her husband."

"Tut—tut—tut, girl! What romantic rubbish have you got into your head? Cope's a nice young fellow, and when you were his wife you would soon learn to love him well enough, I warrant. All I'm afraid of is that he won't have you for a wife—and all through my fault—all through my fault!"

Jane saw that the present was no time to say more on the point, and wisely held her tongue. For a little while the silence between them was unbroken.

"But I haven't told you the worst yet, Jenny," he said at last.

"Oh! papa."

"Five thousand pounds of your Aunt Fanny's money has been lost in the crash. She had entrusted me with the money to do the best I could for her, and that's the result. She will be at Pincote in less than a week from now, and the first thing she will do, after she has taken off her bonnet and changed her boots, will be to ask me for her money. She will ask me for her money, and what am I to say to her?"

"Good gracious, papa! Aunt Fanny is your own sister, and surely she, of all people in the world, would be the last to trouble you for her money."

"She would be the first," said the Squire, fiercely. "I'd sooner, far sooner, be indebted to the veriest stranger than to her. You don't know your aunt as I know her. I should never hear the last of it. I should have no peace of my life. Day and night my turpitude—my vile criminality, as she would call it—would be dinned into my ears, till I should be driven half crazy. And not only that: your aunt Fanny is a woman who can never keep a secret. To one confidential friend after another the whole affair would be whispered, with sundry embellishments of her own, till at last the whole country side would know of it, and I could never hold up my head in society again."

"As I understand the case, papa, you want to raise five thousand pounds within the next few days?"

"That is precisely what I want."

"Then why not ask Mr. Cope? Surely he would not refuse to lend it to you."

"I am not so sure about that," said Mr. Culpepper, drily. "Cope has not been like the same man to me of late that he used to be. The old ship is beginning to leak, and the rats are deserting it. I suppose I shall be compelled to ask him, but I would almost sooner lose my right hand than do it."

"There's Mr. Bristow," suggested Jane, timidly. "Why not speak

to him? He might, perhaps, find some means of helping you out of your difficulty."

"How can a man that's not worth five thousand pence be of any use to a man who wants five thousand pounds?" asked the Squire, contemptuously. "No, no; Bristow's all very well in his way. A decent, good-natured young fellow, with all his wits about him, but of no use whatever at a crisis like the present."

"Is there not such a thing as a mortgage?" asked Jane. "Could you not raise some money on the estate?"

"When my father lay on his deathbed," said the Squire, gravely, "he made me take a solemn oath that I would never raise a penny by mortgage on the estate, and I would rather suffer anything and everything than break that promise. But it's high time we were both in bed. You look worn-out for want of sleep, and I don't feel over bright myself. Kiss me, dearie, and let us say good night, or rather good morning. We must hope for the best, and at present that seems the only thing we can do."

The following post brought a letter from Mrs. McDermot. After mentioning on what day and by what train she might be expected to arrive, she wrote: "You won't forget the five thousand pounds, brother. I have bought some house property, and want to remit the money immediately on my arrival. I suppose it would not be reasonable to expect more than five per cent. interest on the amount?" The Squire tossed the letter across the table to Jane without a word.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WAY OUT OF THE DIFFICULTY.

Two hours after the receipt of Mrs. McDermot's second letter, Squire Culpepper was on his way to Sugden's bank. His heart was heavy, and his step slow. He had never had to borrow a farthing from any man—at least, never since he had come into the estate—and he felt the humiliation, as he himself called it, very bitterly. There was something of bitterness, too, in having to confess to his friend Cope how all his brilliant castles in the air had vanished utterly, leaving not a wrack behind. He could see, in imagination, the sneer that would creep over Cope's face as the latter asked him why he could not obtain a mortgage on his fine new mansion at Pincote; the mansion he had talked so much about—about which he had bored his friends; the mansion that was to have been built out of the Alcazar shares, but of which not even the foundation-stone would ever now be laid. Then, again, the Squire was far from certain as to the kind of reception which would be accorded him by the banker. Of late he had seemed cool, very cool—refrigerating almost. Once or twice, too, when he had called, Mr.

Cope had been invisible : a Jupiter Tonans buried for the time being among a cloud of ledgers and dockets and transfers : not to be seen by any one save his own immediate satellites. The time had been, and not so very long ago, when he could walk unchallenged through the outer bank office, whoever else might be waiting, and so into the inner sanctum, and be sure of a welcome when he got there. But now he was sure to be intercepted by one or other of the clerks with a "Will you please to take a seat for a moment while I see whether Mr. Cope is disengaged." The Squire groaned with inward rage as, leaning on his thick stick, he limped down Duxley High Street and thought of all these things.

As he had surmised it would be, so it was on the present occasion. He had to sit down in the outer office, one of a row of six who were waiting Mr. Cope's time and pleasure to see them. "He won't lend me the money," said the Squire to himself, as he sat there choking with secret mortification. "He'll find some paltry excuse for refusing me. It's almost worth a man's while to tumble into trouble just to find out who are his friends and who are not."

However, the banker did not keep him waiting more than five or six minutes. "Mr. Cope will see you, sir," said a liveried messenger, who came up to him with a low bow ; and into Mr. Cope's parlour the Squire was thereupon ushered.

The two men met with a certain amount of restraint on either side. They shook hands as a matter of course, and made a few remarks about the weather ; and then the banker began to play with his seals, and waited in bland silence to hear whatever the Squire might have to say to him.

Mr. Culpepper fidgetted in his chair and cleared his throat. The crucial moment was come at last. "I'm in a bit of a difficulty, Cope," he began, "and I've come to you, as one of the oldest friends I have, to see whether you can help me out of it."

"I should have thought that Mr. Culpepper was one of the last people in the world to be troubled with difficulties of any kind," said the banker, in a tone of studied coldness.

"Which shows how little you know about either Mr. Culpepper or his affairs," said the Squire, drily.

The banker coughed dubiously. "In what way can I be of service to you ?" he said.

"I want five thousand five hundred pounds by this day week, and I've come to you to help me to raise it."

"In other words, you want to borrow five thousand five hundred pounds ?"

"Exactly so."

"And what kind of security are you prepared to offer for a loan of such magnitude ?"

"What security ! Why, my I.O.U., of course."

Mr. Cope took a pinch of snuff slowly and deliberately before he spoke again. "I am afraid the document in question could hardly be looked upon as a negotiable security."

"And who the deuce wanted it to be considered as a negotiable security?" burst out the Squire. "Do you think I want everybody to know my private affairs?"

"Possibly not," said the banker, quietly. "But, in transactions of this nature, it is a matter of simple business that the person who advances the money should have some equivalent security in return."

"And is not my I.O.U. a good and equivalent security as between friend and friend?"

"Oh! if you are going to put the case in that way, it becomes a different kind of transaction entirely," said the banker.

"And how else did you think I was going to put the case, as you call it?" asked the Squire, indignantly.

"Commercially, of course: as a pure matter of business between one man and another."

"Oh, ho! that's it, is it?" said the Squire, grimly.

"That's just it, Mr. Culpepper."

"Then friendship in such a case as this counts for nothing, and my I.O.U. might just as well never be written."

"Let us be candid with each other," said the banker, blandly. "You want the loan of a very considerable sum of money. Now, however much inclined I might be to lend you the amount out of my own private coffers, you will believe me when I say that I am not in a position to do so. I have no such amount of available capital in hand at present. But if you were to come to me with a good negotiable security, I could at once put you into the proper channel for obtaining what you want. A mortgage, for instance. What could be better than that? The estate, so far as I know, is unencumbered, and the sum you need could easily be raised on it on very easy terms."

"I took an oath to my father on his death-bed that I would never raise a penny by mortgage on Pincote, and I never will."

"If that is the case," said the banker, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "I am afraid that I hardly see in what way I can be of service to you." He coughed, and then he looked at his watch, an action which Mr. Culpepper did not fail to note and resent in his own mind.

"I am sorry I came," he said, bitterly. "It seems to have been only a waste of your time and mine."

"Don't speak of it," said the banker, with his little business laugh. "In any case, you have learned one of the first and simplest lessons of commercial ethics."

"I have indeed," answered the Squire, with a sigh. He rose to go.

"And Miss Culpepper, is she quite well?" said Mr. Cope, rising

also. "I have not had the pleasure of seeing her for some little time."

The Squire faced fiercely round. "Look you here, Horatio Cope," he said; "you and I have been friends of many years' standing. Fast friends, I thought, whom no reverses of fortune would have separated. Finding myself in a little strait, I come to you for assistance. To whom else should I apply? It is idle to say that you could not help me out of my difficulty, were you willing to do so."

"No, believe me ——" interrupted the banker; but Mr. Culpepper went on without deigning to notice the interruption.

"You have not chosen to do so, and there's an end of the matter, so far. Our friendship must cease from this day. You will not be sorry that it is so. The insults and slights you have put upon me of late have all had that end in view, and you are doubtless grateful that they have had the desired effect."

"You judge me very hardly," said the banker.

"I judge you from your own actions, and from them alone," said the Squire, sternly. "Another point, and I have done. Your son was engaged to my daughter, with your full sanction and consent. That engagement, too, must come to an end."

"With all my heart," said the banker, quietly.

"For some time past your son, acting, no doubt, on instructions from his father, has been gradually paving the way for something of this kind. There have been no letters from him for five weeks, and the last three or four that he sent were not more than as many lines each. No doubt he will feel grateful at being released from an engagement that had become odious to him; and on Miss Culpepper's side the release will be an equally happy one. She had learned long ago to estimate at his true value the man to whom she had so rashly pledged her hand. She had found out, to her bitter cost, that she had promised herself to a person who had neither the instincts nor the education of a gentleman—to an individual, in fact, who was little better than a common boor."

This last thrust touched the banker to the quick. His face flushed deeply. He crossed the room and called down an india-rubber tube: "What is the amount of Mr. Culpepper's balance?"

Presently came the answer: "Two eighty eleven five."

"Two hundred and eighty pounds, eleven shillings, and five pence," said Mr. Cope, with a sneer. "May I ask, sir, that you will take immediate steps for having this magnificent balance transferred to some other establishment?"

"I shall take my own time about doing that," said Mr. Culpepper.

"What a pity that your new mansion was not finished in time—quite a castle it was to have been, was it not? A mortgage of five or six

thousand could have been a matter of no difficulty then, you know. If I recollect rightly, all the furniture and decorations were to have come from London. Nothing in Duxley would have been good enough. I merely echo your own words."

The Squire winced. "I am rightly served," he muttered to himself. "What can one expect from a man who swept out an office and cleaned his master's shoes?" He rose to go. For all his bitterness, there was a little pathetic feeling at work in his heart. "So ends a friendship of twenty years," was his thought. "Good-bye, Cope," he said aloud as he moved towards the door.

The banker, standing with his back to the fire, and looking straight at the opposite wall, neither stirred nor spoke, nor so much as turned his head to take a last look at his old friend. And so, without another word, the Squire passed out.

A bleak north wind was blowing as the Squire stepped into the street. He paused for a moment to button his coat more closely around him. As he did so, a poor ragged wretch passed trembling by without saying a word. The Squire called the man back and gave him a shilling. "My plight may be bad enough, but his is a thousand times worse," he said to himself as he walked down the street.

Where to go, or what to do next, he did not know. He had gone to see Mr. Cope without any very great expectation of being able to obtain what he wanted, and yet, perhaps, not without some faint hope nestling at his heart that his friend would find him the money. But now he knew for a fact that nothing was to be got from that quarter, he felt a little chilled, a little lonely, a little lost as to what he should do next. That something must be done, he knew quite well, but he was at a nonplus as to what that something ought to be. To raise five thousand five hundred pounds at a few days' notice, with no better security to offer than a simple I.O.U., was by no means an easy matter, as the Squire was beginning to discover to his cost. "Why not ask Sir Harry Cripps?" he said to himself. But then he bethought himself that Sir Harry had a very expensive family, and that only six months ago he had given up his hunter, and dispensed with a couple of carriage-horses, and had talked of going on to the Continent for four or five years. No: it was evident that Sir Harry Cripps could do nothing for him.

In what other direction to turn he knew not. "If poor Lionel Dering had only been alive, I could have gone to him with confidence," he thought. "Why not try Kester St. George?" was his next thought. "No: Kester isn't one of the lending kind," he muttered, with a shake of the head. "He's uncommonly close-fisted, is Kester. What he's got he'll stick to. No use trying there."

Next moment he nearly ran against General St. George, who was coming from an opposite direction. They started at sight of each

other, then shook hands cordially. Their acquaintanceship dated only from the arrival of the General at Park Newton, but they had already learned to like and esteem one another.

After the customary greetings and inquiries were over, said Mr. Culpepper to the General: "Is your nephew Kester still stopping with you at Park Newton?"

"Yes, he is still there," answered the General; "though he has talked every day for the last month or more about going. Kester is one of those unaccountable fellows that you can never depend on. He may stay for another month, or he may take it into his head to go by the first train to-morrow."

"I heard a little while ago that he was ill. But I suppose he is better again by this time?"

"Yes—quite recovered. He was laid up for three or four days, but he soon got all right again."

"Your other nephew—George—Tom—Harry—what's his name—is he quite well?"

"You mean Richard—he who came from India. Yes, he is quite well."

"He's very like his poor brother, only darker and—pardon me for saying so—not half so agreeable a young fellow."

"Everybody seems to have liked poor Lionel."

"Nobody could help liking him," said the Squire, with energy. "I felt the loss of that poor boy almost as much as if he had been my own son."

"Not a soul in the world had an ill word to say about him."

"I wish that the same could be said of all of us," said the Squire. And so, after a few more words, they parted.

As General St. George had told the Squire, Kester was still at Park Newton. The doctor who was called in to attend him after his sudden attack on the night that the footsteps were heard in the nailed-up room, prescribed a bottle or two of some harmless mixture, and a few days of complete rest and isolation. As Kester would neither allow himself to be examined, nor answer any questions, there was very little more that could be done for him.

Kester's first impulse after his recovery—and a very strong impulse it was—was to quit Park Newton at once and for ever. Further reflection, however, convinced him that such a step would be unwise in the extreme. It would at once be said that he had been frightened away by the ghost, and that was a thing that he could by no means afford to have said of him. For it to get gossiped about that he had been driven from his own house by the ghost of Percy Osmond might, in time, tend to breed suspicion; and from suspicion might spring inquiry, and that might ultimately lead to nobody knew what. No: he would stay on at Park Newton for weeks—for months even, if it suited him to do so.

The incident of his sudden illness was a very untoward one : on that point there could be no doubt whatever : but not if he could anyhow help it should the faintest breath of suspicion spring therefrom.

The Squire's troubles had faded into the background for a few minutes during his interview with General St. George, but they now rushed back upon him with, as it seemed, tenfold force. There was nothing left for him now but to go home, and yet he had never felt less inclined to do so in his life. He dreaded the long quiet evening, with no society but that of his daughter. Not that Jane was a dull companion, or anything like it ; but he dreaded to encounter her pleading eyes, her pretty caressing ways, the lingering embrace she would give him when he entered the house, and her good-night kiss. He felt how all these things would tend to unman him, how they would merely serve to deepen the remorse which he felt already. If only he could meet with someone to take home with him !—he did not care much who it was—someone who would talk to him, and enliven the evening, and take off for a little while the edge of his trouble, and so help him to tide over the weary hours that intervened between now and the morrow. By which time something might happen—he knew not what—or some light be vouchsafed to him which would show him a way out of his difficulties.

These, or something like these, were the thoughts that were floating hazily in his mind, when in the distance he spied Tom Bristow striding along at his usual energetic rate. The Squire being still very lame, wisely captured a passing butcher boy, and, with the promise of sixpence, bade him hurry after Tom, and not come back without him.

"You must come back with me to Pincote," he said, when the astonished Tom had been duly captured. "I'll take no refusal. I've got a fit of mopes, and if you don't come and help to keep Jenny and me alive this evening, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live." So saying, the Squire linked his arm in Tom's, and turned his face towards Pincote ; and nothing loth was Tom to go with him.

"I've done a fine thing this afternoon," said Mr. Culpepper, as they drove along in the basket-carriage, which had been waiting for him at the hotel. "I've broken off Jenny's engagement with Edward Cope."

Tom's heart gave a great bound. "Pardon me, sir, for saying so," he said as calmly as he could, "but I never thought that Mr. Cope was in any way worthy of Miss Culpepper."

"You are right, boy. He was not worthy of her."

"From the first time of seeing them together, I felt how entirely unfitted was Mr. Cope to appreciate Miss Culpepper's manifold charms of heart and mind. A marriage between two such people would have been a most incongruous one."

"Thank Heaven ! it's broken now and for ever."

"I've broken off your engagement to Edward Cope," whispered the Squire to Jane in the hall, as he kissed her. "Are you glad or sorry dear?"

"Glad—very, very glad, papa," she whispered back as she rained a score of kisses on his face. Then she began to cry, and with that she ran away to her own room till she could recover herself.

"Women are queer cattle," said the Squire, turning to Tom, "and I'll be hanged if I can ever make them out."

"From Miss Culpepper's manner, sir," said Tom, gravely, "I should judge that you had told her something that pleased her very much indeed."

"Then what did she begin snivelling for?" said the Squire, gruffly.

"Why not tell him everything?" said the Squire to himself, as he and Tom sat down in the drawing-room. "He knows a good deal already—why not tell him more? I know he can do nothing towards helping me to raise five thousand pounds, but it will do me good to talk to him. I must talk to somebody—and I feel sure my secret is quite safe with him. I'll tell him while Jenny's out of the room."

The Squire coughed and hemmed, and poked the fire violently before he could find a word to say. "Bristow," he burst out at last, "I want to raise five thousand five hundred pounds in five days from now, and as I'm rather a bad hand at borrowing, I thought that you could, maybe, give me a hint as to how it could best be done. Cope would have advanced it for me in a moment, only that he happens to be rather short of funds just now, and I don't want to trouble any of my other friends if it can anyhow be managed without." He began to hum the air of an old drinking-song, and poked the fire again. "Capital coals these," he added. "And I got 'em cheap, too. The market went up three shillings a ton the very day after these were sent in."

"Five thousand five hundred pounds is rather a large amount, sir," said Tom, slowly.

"Of course it's a large amount," said the Squire, testily. "If it were only a paltry hundred or two I wouldn't trouble anybody. But never mind, Bristow—never mind. I didn't suppose that you could help me when I mentioned it; and, after all, it's a matter of very little consequence whether I raise the money or not."

"I can only suggest one way, sir, by which the money could be raised in so short a time."

"Eh!" said the Squire, turning suddenly on him, and dropping the poker noisily in the grate. "You don't mean to say that you can see how it's to be done!"

"I think I do, sir. Do you know the piece of ground called Prior's Croft?"

"Very well indeed. It belongs to Duckworth, the publican."

"Between you and me, sir, Duckworth's hard up, and would be glad

to sell the Croft if he could do it quietly and without its becoming generally known that he is short of money."

"Well?" said the Squire, a little impatiently. He could not understand what Tom was driving at.

"I dare engage to say, sir, that you could have the Croft for two thousand pounds, cash down."

"Confound it, man, what an idiot you must be!" said the Squire fiercely, bringing his fist down on the table with a tremendous bang.

"Didn't I tell you that I wanted to borrow money, and not to spend it? In fact, as you know quite well, I've got none to spend."

"Precisely so," said Tom, coolly. "And that is the point to which I am coming, if you will hear me out."

The Squire's only answer was to glare at him as if in doubt whether he had not taken leave of his senses.

"As I said before, sir, Duckworth will take two thousand pounds for the Croft, cash down. Now I, sir, will engage to raise two thousand pounds for you by to-morrow at noon, with which to buy the piece of ground in question. The purchase can be effected, and the necessary deeds made out and completed, by ten o'clock the following morning. If you will entrust those deeds into my possession, I will guarantee to effect a mortgage for six thousand pounds, in your name, on the Croft."

If the Squire had looked suspicious with regard to Tom's sanity before, he now seemed to have no doubt whatever on the point. He quietly took up the poker again, as if he were afraid that Tom might spring at him unexpectedly.

"So you could lend me two thousand pounds, could you?" said the Squire, drily.

"I did not say that, sir. I said that I could raise two thousand pounds for you, which is a very different matter from lending it out of my own pocket."

"Humph! And who, sir, do you think would be such a consummate ass as to advance six thousand pounds on a plot of ground that had just been bought for two thousand?"

"Strange as such a transaction may seem to you, sir, I give you my word of honour that I should find no difficulty in carrying it out. Have I your permission to do so?"

"I suppose that the two thousand raised by you would have to be repaid out of the six thousand raised by mortgage, leaving me with a balance of four thousand in hand?" said the Squire, without heeding Tom's question, a smile of incredulity playing round his mouth.

"No, sir," answered Tom. "The two thousand pounds could remain on interest at five per cent. for whatever term might suit your convenience. Again, sir, I ask, have I your permission to negotiate the transaction for you?"

Mr. Culpepper gazed steadily for a moment or two into Tom's clear,
VOL. XVIII. N

cold eyes. There were no symptoms of insanity visible there, at any rate. "And do you mean to tell me in sober seriousness," he said, "that you can raise this money in the way you speak of?"

"In sober seriousness, I mean to tell you that I can. Try me."

"I will try you," answered the Squire, impulsively. "I will try you, boy. You are a strange fellow, and I begin to think that there's more in you than I ever thought there was. But here comes Jenny. Not a word more just now."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE SYCAMORE WALK.

THE Park Newton clocks, with more or less unanimity as to time, had just struck ten. It was a February night, clear and frosty, and Lionel Dering sat in his dressing-room in slippers and ease, musing by firelight. He had turned out the lamp on purpose; it was too garish for his mood to-night. He was back again in thought at Gatehouse Farm. Again he saw the grey old cottage, with its moss-grown eaves—the cottage that was so ugly outside, but so cosy within. Again he saw the long low sand-hills, where they stretched themselves out to meet the horizon, and, in fancy, heard again the low, monotonous plash of the waves, whose melancholy music, heard by day and night, had at one time been as familiar to him as the sound of his own voice. What a quiet, happy time that seemed as he now looked back to it—a time of soft shadows and mild sunshine, with a pensive charm that was all its own, and that was lost for ever in the hour which told him that he was a rich man! Riches! What had riches done for him? He groaned in spirit as he asked himself the question. He could have been happy with Edith in a garret—how happy none but himself could have told—had fortune compelled him to earn her bread and his own by the sweat of his strong right arm.

His musings were interrupted by a knock at the door. "Come in," he called out mechanically; and in there came, almost without a sound, Dobbs, body-servant to Kester St. George.

"Oh, Dobbs, is that you?" said Lionel, a little wearily, as he turned his head and saw who it was.

"Yes, sir, I have made bold to intrude upon you for a few seconds," said Dobbs, with the utmost deference, as he slowly advanced into the room, rubbing the long lean fingers of one hand softly with the palm of the other. "My master has not yet got back from Duxley, and there's nobody about just now."

"Quite right, Dobbs," said Lionel. "Anything fresh to report?"

"Nothing particularly fresh, sir, but I thought that you might perhaps like to see me."

"Very considerate of you, Dobbs, but I am not aware that I have anything of consequence to say to you to-night."

"Thank you, sir," said Dobbs, with a faint smile and an extra rub of his fingers. "Master's still very queer, sir. No appetite worth speaking about. Obligated to screw himself up with brandy in a morning before he can finish his toilet. Mutters and moans a good deal in his sleep, sir."

"Mutters in his sleep, does he?" said Lionel. "Have you any idea, Dobbs, what it is that he talks about?"

"I have tried my best to ascertain, sir, but without much success. I have listened and listened for hours, and very cold work it is, sir; but there's never more than a word now and a word then that one can make out. Nothing connected—nothing worth recollecting."

"Does Mr. St. George still walk in his sleep?"

"He does, sir, but not very often—not more than two or three times a month."

"Keep your eyes open, Dobbs, and the very next time your master walks in his sleep come to me at once—never mind what hour it may be—and tell me."

"I won't fail to do so, sir."

"In these sleep-walking rambles does Mr. St. George always confine himself to the house, or does he ever venture out into the park or grounds?"

"He generally goes out of doors, sir, at such times. Three times out of four he goes as far as the Wizard's Fountain in the Sycamore Walk, stops there for a minute or two, and then walks back home. I have watched him several times."

"The Wizard's Fountain, in the Sycamore Walk! What should take him there?"

"Then you know the place, sir?"

"I know it well."

"Can't say what fancy takes him there, sir. Perhaps he doesn't know himself."

"In any case, let me know when he next walks in his sleep. I have no further instructions for you to-night, Dobbs."

"Thank you, sir. I have the honour to wish you a very good night, sir."

"Good night, Dobbs. Keep your eyes open, and report everything to me."

"Yes, sir, yes. You may trust me for doing that, sir." And Dobbs the obsequious bowed himself out.

In his cousin's valet Lionel had found an instrument ready to his hand, but it was not till after long hesitation and doubt that he made up his mind to avail himself of it. The necessities of the case at length decided him to do so. No one appreciated the value of a bribe

better than Dobbs, or worked harder or more conscientiously to deserve one. There was a crooked element in his character which made whatever money he might earn by indirect means, or by tortuous working, seem far sweeter to him than the honest wages of every-day life. Kester St. George was not the kind of man ever to try to attach his inferiors to himself by any tie of gratitude or kindness. At different times and in various ways he suffered for this indifference, although the present could hardly be considered as a case in point, seeing that it was not in the nature of Dobbs to resist a bribe in whatever shape it might offer itself, and that gratitude was one of those virtues which had altogether been omitted from his composition.

Late one afternoon, a few days after the interview between Lionel and Dobbs, Kester St. George had his horse brought round, and rode out unattended, and without leaving word in what direction he was going, or at what hour he might be expected back. The day was dull and lowering, with fitful puffs of wind, that blew first from one point and then from another, and seemed the forerunners of a coming storm. Buried in his own thoughts, Kester paid no heed to the weather, but rode quickly forward till several miles of country had been crossed. By and by he diverged from the main road, and turned his horse's head into a tortuous and muddy lane, which, after half an hour's bad travelling, landed him on the verge of a wide stretch of brown, treeless moor, than which no place could well have looked more desolate and cheerless under the grey monotony of the darkening February afternoon. Kester halted for awhile at the end of the lane to give his horse breathing time. Far as the eye could see, looking forward from the point where he was standing, all was bare and treeless, without one single sign of habitation or life.

"Whatever else may be changed, either with me or the world," he muttered, "the old moor remains just as it was the first day that I can remember it. It was horrible to me at first, but I learned to like it—to love it even, before I left it; and I love it now—to-day—with all its dreariness and monotony. It is like the face of an old friend. You may go away for twenty years, and when you come back you know that you will find on it just the same look that it wore when you went away. Not that I have ever cared to cultivate such friendships," he added, half regretfully. "Well, the next best thing to having a good friend is to have a good enemy, and I can thank heaven for granting me several such."

He touched his horse with the spur, and rode slowly forward, taking a narrow bridle-path that led in an oblique direction across the moor. "This ought to be the road, if my memory serves me aright," he muttered, "but they are all so much alike, and intersect each other so frequently, that it's far more easy to lose one's way than to know where one is."

"I suppose I shall have the rough side of Mother Mim's tongue when I do find her," he went on. "I've neglected her shamefully, without a doubt. But such ties as the one between her and me become tiresome in the long run. She ought to have died off long ago, but she's as tough as leather. Poor devils in this part of the country, that haven't a penny to bless themselves with, think nothing of living till they're a hundred. Is it a surplus of ozone, or a want of brains, that keeps them alive so long?"

He rode steadily forward till he had nearly crossed one angle of the moor. At length, but not without some difficulty, he found the place he had come in search of. It was a rudely-built hut—cottage it could hardly be called—composed of mud, and turf, and great boulders all unhewn. Its roof of coarsest thatch was frayed and worn with the wind and rain of many winters. Its solitary door of old planks, roughly nailed together, opened full on to the moor.

At the back was a patch of garden-ground, which was supposed to grow potatoes in the season, but which had never yet been known to grow any that were fit to eat. Mr. St. George looked round with a sneer as he dismounted.

"And it was in this wretched den that I spent the first eight years of my existence!" he muttered. "And the woman whom this place calls its mistress was the first being whom I learned to love! And, faith, I'm rather doubtful whether I've ever loved anybody half so well since."

Putting his horse's bridle over a convenient hook, and dispensing with the ceremony of knocking, Kester St. George lifted the latch, pushed open the door, stooped his head, and went in. Inside the hut everything was in semi-darkness, and Kester stood for a minute with the door in his hand, striving to make out the objects before him.

"Come in and shut the door: I expected you," said a hollow voice from one corner of the room; and the one room, such as it was, comprised the whole hut.

"Is that you, Mother Mim?" asked Kester.

"Aye—who else should it be?" answered the voice. "But come in and shut the door. That cold wind gives me the shivers."

Kester did as he was told, and then made his way to a wretched pallet at the other end of the hut. Of furniture there was hardly any, and the aspect of the whole place was miserable in the extreme. Over the ashes of a wood fire crouched a girl of sixteen, ragged and unkempt, who stared at him with black, glittering eyes as he passed her. Next moment he was standing by the side of a ragged pallet, on which lay the figure of a woman who looked ill almost unto death.

"Why, mother, whatever has been the matter with you?" asked Kester. "A little bit out of sorts, eh? But you'll soon be all right again now."

"Yes, I shall soon be all right now—soon be quite well," answered the woman grimly. "A black box and six feet of earth cure everything."

"You mustn't talk in that way, mother," said Kester, as he sat down on the only chair in the place, and took one of the woman's lean, hot hands in his. "You will live to plague us for many a year to come."

"Kester St. George, this is the last time you and I will meet in this world."

"I hope not, with all my heart," said Kester, feelingly.

"I know what I know, and I know that what I say is true," answered Mother Mim. "You would not have come now if I had not worked a spell strong enough to bring you here even against your will. I worked it four nights ago, at midnight, when that young viper there"—pointing a finger at the girl, who was still cowering over the ashes—"was fast asleep, and there were no eyes to see but those of the cold stars. Ah! but it was horrible! and if it had not been that I felt I must see you before I died, I could never have gone through with it." She paused for a moment, as though overcome by some dreadful recollection. "Then, when it was over, I crept back to bed, and waited quietly, knowing that now you could not choose but come."

"I ought to have come and seen you long ago—I know it—I feel it," said Kester. "But let bygones be bygones, and I give you my solemn promise never to neglect you again. I am rich now, mother, and you shall never want for anything as long as you live."

"Too late—too late!" sighed the woman. "Yes, you're rich now, rich enough to bury me, and that's all I ask you to do."

"Don't talk like that, mother," said Kester.

"If you had only come to see me!" said the woman. "That was all I wanted. Just to see your face, and squeeze your hand, and have you talk to me for a little while. I wanted none of your money—no, not a single shilling of it. It was only you I wanted."

Kester began to feel slightly bored. He squeezed Mother Mim's hand, and then dropped it, but he did not speak.

"But you didn't come," moaned the woman, "and you wouldn't have come now if I hadn't worked a charm to bring you."

"There you wrong me," said Kester, decisively. "Your charm, or spell, or whatever it may have been, had no effect in bringing me here. I came of my own free will."

"Self-conceited, as you always were and always will be," muttered the woman. Then, half raising herself in bed, and addressing the girl, she cried: "Nell, you hussy, just you hook it for a quarter of an hour. The gent and I have something to talk about."

The girl rose sullenly, went slowly out, and banged the door behind her.

Kester wondered what was coming next. He had dropped the woman's hand, but she now held it out for him to take again. He took it, and she pressed his hand passionately to her lips three or four times.

"If the great secret of my life is to be told at all on this side the grave, the time to tell it is now come. I always thought to die without revealing it, but somehow of late everything has seemed different to me, and I feel now as if I couldn't die easy without telling you." She paused for a minute, exhausted. There was some brandy on the chimney-piece, and Kester gave her a little. Again she took his hand and kissed it passionately.

"You will, perhaps, curse me for what I am about to tell you," she went on, "but whether you do so or not, so may Heaven help me if it is anything more than the simple truth! Kester St. George, you have no right to the name you bear—to the name the world knows you by!"

Kester was so startled that for a moment or two he sat like one suddenly stricken dumb. "Go on," he said at last. "There's more to follow. I like boldness in lying as in everything else."

"Again I swear that I am telling you no more than the solemn truth."

"If I am not Kester St. George," he said, with a sneer, "perhaps you will kindly inform me who I really am."

"You are my son!"

He flung the woman's hand savagely from him, and sprang to his feet with an oath. "Your son!" he said. "Ha! ha! ha! Your son, indeed! Since when have your senses quite left you, Mother Mim? A dark cell in Bedlam and a strait-waistcoat would be your best physic."

"I am rightly punished," moaned the woman—"rightly punished. I ought to have told you years ago—aye—before you ever grew to be a man. But I loved you so, and had such pride in you, that I couldn't bear the thought of telling you, and it's only now when I'm on my deathbed that the secret forces itself from me. But it will go no further, never you fear that. No living soul but you will ever hear it from my lips; and you have only got to keep your own lips tightly shut, and you will live and die as Kester St. George."

She sank back with the exhaustion of speaking. Mechanically, and almost without knowing what he was doing, Kester again gave her a little brandy. Then he sat down; and Mother Mim, finding his hand close by, took possession of it again. He shuddered slightly, but did not withdraw it.

Although Mother Mim had advanced no proofs in support of the strange story she had just told him, there was something in her tone which carried conviction to his inmost heart.

"I must know more of this," he said, after a little while, speaking almost in a whisper.

"How well I remember everything about it! It seems only like yesterday that it all happened," sighed the woman. "You—my own child, and he—the other one that was sent to me to nurse, were born within a few hours of one another. His father broke a blood-vessel about six weeks after the child was brought to me. The mother went with her husband to Italy to take care of him, and the child was left with me. A week or two afterwards he was taken suddenly ill, and died. Then the devil tempted me to put my own boy into the place of the lost heir. When Mrs. St. George came back from Italy she came to see her child, and you were shown to her as that child. She accepted you without a moment's suspicion. They let you stay with me till you were eight years old, and then they took you away and sent you to school. My husband and my sister were the only two beside myself who knew what had been done, and they both died years ago without saying a word. I shall join them in a few days, and then you alone will be the keeper of the secret. With you it will die, and on your tombstone they will write: 'Here lies the body of Kester St. George.'"

She had told her story with great difficulty, and with frequent interruptions to gather strength and breath to finish it. She now lay back, utterly exhausted. Her eyes closed, her hand relaxed its hold on Kester's, her jaw dropped slightly, the thin white face grew thinner and whiter: it seemed as if Death, passing that way, had looked in unexpectedly, and had beckoned her to go with him. Kester rose quickly, and struck a match and lighted a fragment of candle that he found on the chimney-piece. His next impulse was to try and revive her with a little brandy. But he paused with the glass in his hand. Why try to revive her? Would it not be better for him, for her, for everyone, if she were really dead? If such were the case, it would do away with all fear of her strange secret being ever divulged to anyone else. Yes—in every way her death would be a welcome release.

It was not without a tremor, it was not without a faster beating of the heart, that Kester took the bit of cracked looking-glass from the wall and held it to the woman's lips. His very life seemed to stand still for a moment or two while he waited for the result. It came. The glass clouded faintly. The woman was not dead. With a muttered curse Kester dashed the glass across the floor and put back the candle on the chimney-piece. Then he took up his hat. Where was the use of staying longer? She could tell him nothing more when she should have come to her senses than she had told him already: nothing, that is, of any consequence; and as for details, he did not want them—at least, not now. What he had been told already held food enough for thought for some time to come. He paused for a moment before going

out. Was it really possible—was it really credible, that that haggard, sharp-featured woman was his mother?—that his father had been a coarse, common labouring-man, a mere hedger and ditcher, who had lived and died in that mean hut, and that he himself, instead of being the Kester St. George he had always believed himself to be, was no other than the son of those two—the boy of whose supposed death he remembered to have heard about when little more than a mere child?

Fiercely and savagely he told himself again and again that such a thing could not be—that what Mother Mim had told him was nothing more than a pack of devil's lies—the invention of a brain weakened and distorted by illness and the clouds of coming death. It was high time to go. He put five sovereigns on the chimney-piece, went softly out, and shut the door behind him. The girl was sitting on the low mud-wall near the door, with the skirt of her dress drawn over her head as some protection from the bitter wind. Her black, glittering eyes took him in from head to foot as he walked up to her. "Go inside at once. She has fainted," said Kester. The girl nodded and went. Then Kester mounted his horse and rode slowly homeward through the chilly twilight. Bitterest thoughts held him as with a vice. When he came within sight of the chimneys of Park Newton, he gave a sigh of relief, and put spurs to his horse. "That is mine, and no power on earth shall take it from me," he muttered. "That and the money that comes with it. I am Kester St. George. Let those disprove it who can!"

A few nights later, as Lionel Dering was sitting in his dressing-room, smoking a last cigar before turning in, there came three low, distinct taps at the door, which he recognised as the peculiar signal of Dobbs. It was nearly an hour past midnight, and in that early household everyone had been long abed, or, at least, had retired long ago to their own rooms.

Lionel opened the door, and Dobbs slid softly in. Such visits were by no means infrequent, but they were usually paid at a somewhat earlier hour than on the present occasion.

"Come in, Dobbs," said Lionel, "You are later to-night than usual."

"Yes, sir, I am, and I must ask you to pardon me for intruding at such an hour; but, if you remember, sir, you told me, a little while ago, that I was to let you know without fail the very next time my master took to walking in his sleep."

"Quite right, Dobbs. I am glad that you have not forgotten my instructions."

"Well, sir, Mr. St. George left his rooms, a few minutes ago, fast asleep."

"In which direction did he go?"

"He went down the side staircase, and through the conservatory, and let himself out through the little glass door into the garden."

"And then which way did he go?"

"I did not follow him any further, but ran at once to tell you."

"Have you any idea as to what direction he would be most likely to take?"

"There is little doubt, sir, but that he has gone towards the Wizard's Fountain, in the Sycamore Walk. Three times already, that is the place to which he has gone."

"We must follow him, Dobbs."

"Yes, sir."

"We must watch him, but be careful not to disturb him."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose there is little or no fear of his waking before he gets back to the house?"

"None whatever, sir, as far as my experience goes. As a rule he goes quietly back to his own rooms, undresses himself as quietly and soberly as if he was wide awake, and gets into bed; and when he does really wake up in the morning, he never seems to know anything about what has happened overnight. But we must make haste, sir, if we wish to overtake him."

"I will be ready in one minute."

Lionel wrapped a warm furred cloak about him, and put a travelling-cap on his head. Three minutes later he and Dobbs stood together in the open air.

The night was clear, crisp, and cold. The moon was just rising above the tree-tops, bathing the upper part of the quaint old house in its white glory, but as yet the shrubbery and the garden-paths lay in deepest shadow. Nowhere could they discern the figure of the man whom they had come out to follow; but the Wizard's Fountain was a good half mile from the Hall, so they struck at once into the nearest footway that led towards it. A few minutes' quick walking took them there. Lionel knew the place well. It had been a favourite haunt of his when living at Park Newton during the few happy weeks that preceded the murder. Very weird and solemn the whole place looked, as seen by moonlight at this still hour of the night.

Although known as the Sycamore Walk, there were only two trees of that particular kind growing there, and they threw their antique shadows immediately over the fountain itself. The rest of the avenue consisted of beech, and oak, and elm. But all the trees were huge, and old, and fantastic: untended and uncared for—growing together year after year, whispering their leafy secrets to each other with every spring that came round, and standing shoulder to shoulder against the winds of winter: a hoary brotherhood of forest sages.

The fountain itself, whatever it might have been in years long gone by, was now nothing more than a confused heap of huge stones, overgrown with lichens and creepers. From the midst of them, and from

what had doubtless at one time been a representation in marble of the head of a leopard or other forest animal, but which now was worn almost past recognition, trickled a thin stream of coldest water. Which, falling into a broken basin below, overbrimmed itself there, and was lost among the cracks and interstices in the masses of broken masonry that lay scattered around.

"You had better, perhaps, wait here," said Lionel to Dobbs as they halted for a moment at the entrance to the avenue.

Dobbs did as he was bidden, and Lionel advanced alone, keeping well within the shade of the trees. When within a dozen yards of the fountain he halted and waited. The low, ceaseless monotone of the fountain was the only sound that broke the moonlit silence.

From out the dense shadow of the trees on the opposite side of the avenue, and as if he himself were part of that shadow, Kester St. George slowly emerged. In the middle of the avenue, and in the full light of the moon, he paused. His right hand was thrust into the bosom of his vest, as if he were hiding something there. Standing thus, he seemed, as it were, to shrink within himself. Still hugging that hidden something, he seemed to listen—to listen as if his very life depended on the act. Then, with a slow, creeping motion, as though his feet were weighted with lead, he stole towards the fountain. He reached it. He grasped the stonework with one hand, and then he turned to gaze, as though in dread of some hidden pursuer. Then slowly, almost reluctantly, he seemed to draw something from within his vest, and, while still gazing furtively around him, he thrust his arm, elbow deep, into a crevice in the masonry, let it rest there for a single moment, and then withdrew it. With the same furtively restless look, and ears that seemed to listen more intently than ever, he paused for an instant. Then he stole swiftly back across the moonlit avenue, and so vanished among the black shadows from whence he had come.

So natural had been his actions, so unstudied his every movement, that it seemed impossible to believe that he was indeed asleep.

Hardly had Kester St. George disappeared, before Lionel Dering was by the fountain, on the very spot where his cousin had stood half a minute before. He had noted well the place. There, before him, was the very crevice into which Kester had thrust his arm. Into that same crevice was Lionel's arm now thrust—elbow deep—shoulder deep. His groping fingers soon laid hold of that which was hidden there. He drew out his arm quickly, and the something that he had found glittered steel-blue in the moonlight. With a cry of horror he dropped it, and it fell with a dull clash among the stones. Lionel Dering had recognised it in a moment as a dagger which he had last seen in the possession of Percy Osmond.

(To be continued.)

ABEL CREW.

THINGS are done in remote country places that would not be done in towns. Whether the law is understood by us, or whether it is not, it often happens that it is very much exceeded, or otherwise not acted upon. Those who have to exercise it sometimes show themselves as ignorant as if they had lived all their lives in the wilds of America.

Old Jones the constable was one of these. When not checked by his masters, the magistrates, he would do most outrageous things—speaking of legality and common sense. And he did one in reference to Abel Crew.

George Reed's two little children, Susan and Henrietta, twins, aged one year, less two weeks, had died suddenly and in great agony. Sick from the cutting of their teeth, the mother, Hester Reed, had administered to each a delectable compound of sugar and warm water and two smashed-up pills. That is, a pill apiece. The pills were supposed to have killed the children. They had been furnished to Mrs. Reed some weeks before, for her own especial swallowing, by Abel Crew the herbalist. I still say Crew. Though it had come out that his name was Carew, we should be sure to call him Crew to the end.

The inquest might have been concluded at its first sitting, but for two malcontents amid the jury. Perkins the butcher and Dobbs the blacksmith. Truth to say these two had plenty of intelligence: which could not be said of all the rest. The ten pronounced the case to be as clear as daylight: the infants had been poisoned by Abel Crew's pills. These ten were ready and willing to return a verdict of manslaughter there and then, and the coroner seemed to agree with them—he hated trouble. But Dobbs and Perkins held out. They were not satisfied, they said; the pills furnished by Abel Crew might not have been the same pills that were taken by the children; moreover, they considered that the pills should be "more officially" analysed. Pettipher the druggist was all very well in his small way, but hardly up, in their opinion, to pronouncing upon pills when a man's life or liberty was at stake. They pressed for an adjournment, that the pills might be examined by some competent authority. The coroner, as good as telling them they were fools to their faces, adjourned the inquest in suppressed passion to that day week.

"And I've got to take care of you, Abel Crew," said old Jones, floundering up on his gouty legs to Abel as the jury and crowd dispersed. "You've got to come along o' me."

"To come where?" asked Abel, who was hobbling towards home

on his scalded foot, by the help of his stick and the arm of Gibbon the gamekeeper.

"To the lock-up," said old Jones.

"To the lock-up!" echoed Abel Crew.

"In course," returned old Jones. "Where else but the lock-up? Did you think it was to the pound?"

Abel Crew, lifting the hand that held his stick to brush a speck of dirt off his handsome velvet coat, turned to the constable; his nice face, a little paler than usual, gazing inquiringly at old Jones's, his silver hair shining in the setting sun.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Jones," he said calmly. "You cannot mean to lock me up."

"Well I never!" cried old Jones; who had a knack of considering every suspected person guilty, and treating them accordingly. "You have got a cheek, you have, Abel Crew! Not a going to take me to the lock-up, Mr. Jones, says you! Where 'ould you be took to? Come!"

"But there's no necessity for it," said Abel. "I shall not run away. I shall be in my house if I'm wanted again."

"I daresay you would!" said old Jones. "You might or you mightn't, you know. You're as good as committed for the killing and slaying o' them there two twins, and it's my business to see as you *don't* make your escape aforehand, Abel Crew."

Lots of listeners had come up by this time; quite a crowd of us. I gave old Jones a bit of my mind.

"He is not yet committed, Jones, therefore you have no right to take him or to lock him up."

"You don't know nothing about it, Mr. Ludlow. I do. The crowner give me a hint, and I'm acting on it. 'Don't you go and let that man escape,' says his worship to me; 'it'll be at your peril if you do.' 'I'll see to him, your worship,' says I. And I be a doing of it."

But it was hardly likely that the coroner meant Abel Crew to be confined in that precious lock-up for a whole week. One night, when prisoners did get into it, was pretty well. At least, I did not think he meant it; but the crowd, to judge by their comments, seemed divided on the point.

"The shortest way to settle the question will be to ask the coroner, old Jones," said I, turning to run back to the Silver Lion. "Come along!"

"You'd be clever to catch him, Master Johnny," roared out old Jones after me. "His worship jumped into his gig, which was a waiting for him when he come out o' the inquest room, and his clerk druv him off at a slapping pace."

It was true. The coroner was gone: and old Jones had it all his own way; for, you see, none of us liked to interfere with an official

gentleman who held sway in the county and sat on dead people. Abel Crew accepted the alternative meekly, as he did most things.

"Any way, you must allow me to go home first and lock my house up, and do one or two little matters that I must do," said he.

"Not unless you goes under my own eyes," retorted old Jones. "You might be for destroying of your stock o' pills for fear they should bear evidence again you, Abel Crew."

"My pills are, of all things, what I would not destroy," said Abel. "They would bear testimony for me, instead of against me, for they are innocent."

So Abel Crew hobbled to his cottage on the common, attended by old Jones and a long tail of followers. Arrived there, he attended the first thing to his scalded foot, dressing it with some of his own ointment. Then he secured some bread-and-butter, not knowing what the accommodation at the Lock-up might be in the shape of eatables, and changed his handsome quaint suit of clothes for those he wore every day. After that, he was escorted back to the Lock-up.

Now, the Lock-up was in Piefinch-Cut, nearly opposite to Dovey the blacksmith's. I have heard the Squire say that he remembered the time when the Lock-up stood alone; when Piefinch-Cut had no more houses in it than Piefinch Lane now has; but since then Piefinch-Cut had been built upon and inhabited; houses touching even the sacred walls of the Lock-up. A tape-and-cotton and sweetstuff shop flanked it on one side, and a small pork-butcher's on the other. Pettipher's druggist's shop, should anybody be curious on the point, was next to the tape and cotton mart.

To see Abel Crew arrive in the custody of old Jones the constable, and the excited tail of stragglers after them, astonished Piefinch-Cut not a little. Figg the pawnbroker—who was originally from Alcester—considered himself learned in the law. Any way he was a great talker, and liked to give his opinion upon any topic that might turn up. His shop joined Dovey's forge: and when we got up, Figg was outside, holding forth to Dovey, who had his shirt-sleeves rolled up above his elbows as usual and his leather apron on. Mrs. Dovey stood listening behind, in the smart gown and red-ribboned bonnet she had worn at the inquest.

"Why—what on earth!—have they been and gone and took up Crew?" cried Figg in his surprise.

"It is an awful shame of old Jones," I burst in; speaking more to Dovey than Figg, for Figg was no favourite of mine. "A whole week of the Lock-up! Only think of it, Dovey!"

"But have they brought it in again' him, Master Johnny?" cried Dovey, unfolding his grimey arms to touch his paper cap to me as he spoke.

"No; that's what they have not done. The inquest is adjourned for

a week ; and I don't believe old Jones has a right to take him at all. Not in law, you know."

"That's just what her brought word," said Dovey, with a nod backward to indicate his wife. "'Well, how be it turned, Ann?' says I to her when her come back—for I'd got a sight o' work in to-day and couldn't go myself. 'Oh, it haven't turned no ways yet, Jack,' says her, 'it be put off to next week?' There he goes! right in."

This last remark applied to Abel Crew. After fumbling in his pocket for the two big keys, tied together by string, and then fumbling at the latch, old Jones succeeded in opening the door. Not being used much, the lock was apt to grow rusty. Then he stood back, and with a flourish of hands motioned Abel in. In he went, making no resistance.

"They must know for certain as 'twere his pills what done it," struck in Mrs. Dovey.

"No they don't," said I. "What's more, I don't think it was his pills. Abel Crew says he never put poison in his pills yet, and I believe him."

"Well and no more it don't stand to reason as he would, Mr. Ludlow," said Figg, a man whose self-complaisance was not to be put down by any amount of discouragement. "I were just a saying so to Dovey.—Why have old Jones took him up?" went on Figg to Gibbon the game-keeper, who came sauntering by.

"Jones says he has the coroner's orders for it," answered Gibbon.

"Look here : I know a bit about law ; and I know a man oughtn't to be shut up till some charge is brought again' him," added Figg. "Crew's pills is suspected, but he have not been charged yet."

"Any way, it's what Jones has gone and done," said Gibbon. "Perhaps he is right. And a week's not much : it'll soon pass. But as to any pills of Abel Crew's having killed them children, it's just preposterous to think of it."

"What d'ye suppose did kill 'em, then, Richard Gibbon?" demanded Ann Dovey, a hot flush on her face, her tone resentful.

"That's just what has to be found out," returned Gibbon, passing on his way.

"If it hadn't been for that there Dobbs and Butcher Perkins a holding-out again it, Crew 'ud ha' been brought in guilty safe enough," said Ann Dovey. And the tone was again so excited, so bitterly resentful against Dobbs and Perkins, that I could not help looking at her in wonder. It sounded just as though the non-committal of Abel were a wrong inflicted on herself.

"No, he would not have been brought in guilty," I answered her. "He would have been committed for trial : but that's a different thing. If the matter could be sifted to the bottom, I know it would be found that the mischief did not lie with Abel Crew's pills. There, Mrs. Dovey."

She was looking at me out of the corners of her eyes ; for all the world as if she were afraid of me, or of what I said. I could not make her out.

"Why should you wish so particularly to bring it home to Crew?" I pointedly asked her : and Figg turned round and looked at her, as if seconding the question.

"Me want particular to bring it home to Crew !" she retorted, her voice rising to a shriek with temper, or fear, or something ; and she trembling like an aspen leaf. "I don't want to bring it home particular to him, Mr. Ludlow. 'Twere his pills, though, all the same, what done it."

And with that she whisked through the forge to her kitchen.

On the day following I got old Jones to let me into the Lock-up. The place consisted of two rooms opening into one another, and a small square space, no bigger than a closet, with a writing-desk in it, at the end of the passage, where they kept the pen and ink. For that had a window in it, looking to the fields at the back ; the two rooms had only skylights in the roof. In the inner room a narrow iron bedstead stood against the wall, a mattress and blanket on it. Abel was sitting on that when we went in.

"You must have been lively here last night, Abel !"

"Yes, very, sir," answered he, with a half smile. "I did not really mind it : I am used to be alone, you know. I could have done with fewer rats, though."

"Oh, are there rats here?"

"Lots of them, Master Johnny. I don't like rats : nasty things ! They came upon my face, and all about me."

"Why does old Jones not set traps for them ? He considers this place to be under his special protection."

"There's too many for any trap to catch," answered Abel.

Old Jones had gone off to the desk in the closet, having left some bread and butter and milk on the shelf for Abel. His errand there was to enter the cost of the bread in the account-book, to be settled for, later. Prisoners in the Lock-up were commonly treated to bread and water : old Jones had graciously allowed this one to pay for some butter and milk from his own pocket.

"I don't want never to treat 'em harsher nor I be obliged, Master Ludlow," he had said to me, coming in, in reference to the paper of butter and the jug of milk he was carrying. "Abel Crew have been known as a decent man ever since he come among us : and if he chooses to pay for the butter and the milk, there ain't no law again' his having 'em. 'Tain't as if he was a burglar."

"No, he is not a burglar," I answered. "And you must mind that"

you do not get into the wrong box about him. There's neither law nor justice in locking him up, Jones, before he is charged."

"If I had never locked up nobody till they was charged, I should ha' been in the wrong box many a time afore now," said old Jones, doggedly. "Look at that there man last Christmas; what I caught prowling in the grounds at Parrifer Hall, with a whole set of house-breaking things concealed in his pockets. After I'd took him, and lodged him in here safe, it was found that he was one o' the worst characters in the county, only let out o' Worcester jail two days afore. Suppose I'd not took him, Master Johnny?—where 'ud the spoons at Parrifer Hall ha' been?"

"That was a different case altogether."

"I know what I'm about," returned Jones. "The coroner, he just give me a nod or two, looking at Crew as he give it. I knew what it meant, sir: a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse."

Any way, Jones had got him, here in the Lock-up; and had gone off to enter the loaf of bread in the account-book; and I was sitting on the bench opposite Abel.

"It is a wicked shame of them to have put you here, Abel."

"It is not right in law—as I believe," he answered. "And I am sure it is not in justice, sir. I swear those pills and that box, produced at the inquest, were none of mine. They never went out of my hands. Old Jones thinks he is doing right to secure me, I suppose, and he is civil over it; so I must not grumble. He brought me some water to wash in this morning, and a comb."

"But there's no *sense* in it. You would not attempt to escape; you would wait for the reassembling of the inquest."

"Escape!" he exclaimed. "I should be the first to stay for it. I am more anxious than any one to have the matter investigated. Truth to say, Master Johnny, my curiosity is excited. Hester Reed is so persistently sure in regard to their being the same pills and box that I gave her; and as she is a truthful, honest woman, one can't see where the mistake lies. There must be mystery in it somewhere."

"Suppose you are committed to take your trial? And found guilty?"

"That I shall be committed, I look upon as certain," he answered. "As to being found guilty—if I am, I must bear it. God knows my innocence, and I must try to let that help me. I shall hope that in time He will bring it to light."

"All the same, Abel, they ought not to put you in here."

"That's true, sir."

"And then there will be the lying in prison until the Assizes—two or three good months to come! Don't you go and die of it, Abel."

"No, I shall not do that," he answered, smiling a little. "My innocence will keep me up."

I sat looking at him. What light could get in through the dusty skylight fell on his silver hair, smooth as usual, thanks to the comb, and falling back from his pale face. He held his head down in thought, only raising it to answer me. Some movement in the closet betokened old Jones's speedy approach, and I hastened to assure Abel that all sensible people would not doubt his innocence.

"Nobody need doubt it, Master Johnny," he answered firmly, his eye kindling. "I have never had a grain of arsenic in my house; I have never had any other poison. There are herbs from which poison may be distilled, but I have never gathered them. When it comes to people requiring poison—and there are some diseases of the human frame that it may be good for—they should go to a qualified medical man, not to a herbalist. No. I have never, never had poison or poisonous herbs within my dwelling; therefore (putting other reasons aside) it is *impossible* that those poisonous pills can be my pills. God hears me say it, and knows that it is true."

Old Jones, balancing the keys in his hand and himself on his fat and gouty legs, was standing within the room, listening. Abel Crew was so respectable and courteous a prisoner, compared to those he generally had in the Lock-up, burglars, tipsy men, and the like, returning him "thank yous" instead of oaths, that he had already begun to regard him with some favour, and the assertion seemed to make an impression on him.

"Look here," said he. "Whose pills could they have been, if they warn't your'n?"

"I cannot imagine," returned Abel Crew. "I am as curious about it as anybody else—Master Ludlow here knows I am. I daresay it will come out sometime. They *could not* have been made up by me."

"What was that you told the coroner about your pill-boxes being marked?" asked old Jones.

"And so they are marked; all of them. The pill-box I saw there——"

"I mean the stock o' boxes you've got at home. Be them all marked?"

"Every one of them. When I get in a fresh lot of pill-boxes, the first thing I do, on bringing them home, is to mark them."

"Then look here. You just trust me with the key of your place, and tell me where the boxes is to be found, and I'll go and secure 'em and lay 'em afore the coroner. If they're found to be all marked, it'll tell in your favour."

The advice sounded good, and Abel Crew handed over his key. Jones looked solemn as he and I went away together.

"It's an odd thing, though, Master Johnny, ain't it, how the pison could ha' got into them there pills," said he slowly, as he put the big key into the lock of the outer door.

And we had an audience round us before the words were well spoken.

To see the Lock-up made fast when there was a prisoner inside it, was always a coveted recreation in Piefinch-Cut. Several individuals had come running up; not to speak of children from the gutters. Dovey stood in front of his forge gazing; Figg, who liked to be lounging about outside when he had no customers transacting delicate negotiations inside, put his back against his shop window and stared in concert with Dovey. Jones, flourishing the two formidable keys, crossed over to them.

"How do he feel to-day?" asked Figg, nodding towards the Lock-up.

"He don't feel no worse appariently nor he do other days," replied old Jones. "It be a regular odd thing, it be."

"What be odd?" asked Dovey.

"How the pison could ha' got into them there pills. Crew says he has never had no pison in his place o' no kind, herbs nor else."

"And I would stake my life that it is the truth," I put in.

"Well, and so I think it is," said Dovey. "Last night George Reed was in here, a talking. He says he one day come across Abel Crew looking for herbs in the copse behind the Grange. Crew was picking and choosing: some herbs he'd leave alone, and some he dug up. Reed spied out a fine-looking plant, and called to him. Up comes Crew, trowel in hand, bends down to take a look, and then gives his head a shake. 'That won't do for me,' says he, 'that plant has poisonous properties,' says he; 'and I never meddles with them what has,' says he. George Reed told us that much in this here forge last night. Him and his wife have a'most had words about it."

"Had words about what?" asked old Jones.

"Why about them there pills. Reed tells her that if it is the pills what poisoned the young ones, she have made some mull o' the box Abel give her and got it changed. But he don't believe as 'twere the pills at all. And Hester Reed, she sticks to it that she never made no mull o' the box, and that the pills is the same."

At this juncture, happening to turn my head, I saw Mrs. Dovey at the door at the back of the forge. Her body was in the kitchen, her face was screwed round the doorpost, listening; and there was a great fear on it. Seeing me looking at her, she disappeared like a shot, and quietly closed the door. A thought flashed into me.

"That woman knows more about it than she will say! And it is frightening her. What can the mystery be?"

The children were buried on the Sunday afternoon, all the parish flocking to the funeral; and the next morning Abel Crew was released. Whether old Jones took a qualm as to the legality of what he had done, or whether he got a mandate from the coroner by the early post, nobody knew. Certain it was, that before nine o'clock old Jones held the Lock-up doors open, and Abel Crew walked out. It was thought that some one must have written privately to the coroner—which was more than

likely. Old Jones was down in the mouth all day, as if he had had an official blowing up.

Abel and his stick went home. The rest and his own doctoring had nearly cured the instep. On the Saturday old Jones had made a descent upon the cottage and cleared it of the pill-boxes. Jones found that every box had Abel's private mark upon it.

"Well, this is a curious start, Crew!" exclaimed Mr. Duffham, meeting him as he was turning in at his gate. "Now in the Lock-up, and now out of it! It may be old Jones's notion of law, but it's not mine. How have you enjoyed it?"

"It would not have been so bad but for the rats, sir," replied Abel. "I could see a few stars shining through the skylight."

"Well, this is a curious start!" Duffham was repeating the phrase to himself this time, and in an undertone: it was rather a favourite of his, just then. The days had gone on to the Thursday, and it was now the evening before the adjourned inquest. Tod and I, in consideration of the popular ferment, had taken the Squire at a favourable moment, and extracted from him another week's holiday. Opinions were divided: some believed in Crew, others in the poisoned pills. As to Crew himself, he was out in his garden as usual, attending to his bees and his herbs and flowers, and quietly awaiting the good or the ill-luck that Fate might be holding in store for him.

It was Thursday evening, I say; and I was taking tea with Duffham. Having looked in upon him, when rushing about the place, he asked me to stay. The conversation turned upon the all-engrossing topic; and I chanced to mention that the behaviour of Ann Dovey puzzled me. Upon that, Duffham said that it was puzzling him. He had been called in to her the previous day and found her in a regular fever, eyes anxious, breath hysterical, face hectic. Since the day of the inquest she had been in this state, and the blacksmith told Duffham he could not make out what had come to her. "Them pills have druv her mad, sir," were Dovey's words, "she can't get 'em off her mind."

The last cup of tea was poured out, and Duffham was shaking round the old black pot to see if he could squeeze out more, when we had an interruption. Dovey came bursting in upon us straight from his forge; his black hair all ruffled, and his small dark face hot with flurry. It was a singular tale he had come to tell. His wife had been making a confession to him. Driven pretty nearly out of her mind by the weight of a secret, she could hold it no longer.

To begin at the beginning. Dovey's house swarmed with black beetles. Dovey himself did not mind the animals, but Mrs. Dovey did; and no wonder, when she could not step out of bed in the night without putting her foot on some. But, if Dovey did not dislike black-beetles, there was another thing he did dislike—hated, in fact; and that

was the stuff called Beetle-Powder : which professed to kill them. Mrs. Dovey would have scattered some on the floor every night ; but Dovey would not allow it. He forbid her to bring a grain of it into the house : it was nothing but poison, he said, and might chance to kill themselves as well as the beetles. Ann Dovey had her way in most matters, for Dovey was easy, as men and husbands go ; but when once he put his veto on a thing, she knew she might as well try to turn the house round as turn him.

Now what did Ann Dovey do ? On that very Easter Tuesday, as it chanced, as soon as dusk set in, off she went to Dame Chad's general shop in Church Dykely, where the beetle-powder was sold, and bought a packet of it. It seemed to her, that of the choice between two evils—to put up with the horrible black animals, or to disobey Dovey, the latter was the more agreeable. She could easily shake some of the powder down lightly of a night ; the beetles—or, as she always pronounced it, beedles—would eat it up before morning, and Dovey would never know it. Accordingly, paying for the powder—a square packet, done up in blue paper, on which was labelled POISON in as large letters as the printer could get into the space—she thrust it down to the depths of her gown pocket, and set off home again. Calling in at George Reed's cottage on her way, she there assisted, as it also chanced, at the administering of the pills to the unfortunate children. And perhaps her motive for calling in was not so much from a love of presiding at physic-giving, as that she might be able to say “At Reed's,” if her husband asked her where she had been when she got home. It fell out as she thought. No sooner had she put foot inside the forge than Dovey began, Where'st been, Ann ? and she told him at Reed's helping with the sick little ones. Dovey's work was over for the night ; he wanted his supper ; and she had no opportunity of using the beetle-powder. It was left untouched in the pocket of her gown. The following morning came the astounding news of the children's death ; and in the excitement caused by that, Mrs. Dovey lost sight of the powder. Perhaps she thought that the general stir might cause Dovey to be more wakeful than usual, and that she might as well let the powder be for a short while. It was safe where it was, in her hung-up gown. Dovey never meddled with her pockets : on or off, they were no concern of his.

But, on the Friday morning, when putting on this same holiday gown to attend the inquest, to which she had been summoned, what was her horror to find the packet burst, and her pocket filled with the loose powder. Mrs. Dovey had no greater love for beetle-powder in itself than she had for beetles, and visibly shuddered. She could not empty it out ; there it had to stay ; for Dovey, excited by his wife's having to give evidence, was in and out of her room like a dog in a fair ; and she went off perforce with the stuff in her pocket. And

when during her examination the questions took the turn they did take, and the coroner asked her whether she had had any poison in her pocket that night at George Reed's; this with the consciousness of what had been that night in her pocket, of what was in her pocket at that very moment, then present, nearly frightened her into fits. From that hour, Ann Dovey had lived in a state of terror. It was not that she believed any of the beetle-powder *could* have got inside the ill-fated young ones (though she did not feel quite easy on the point), as that she feared the accusation might be shifted off Crew's shoulders and on to hers. On this Thursday evening she could hold out no longer: and disclosed all to Dovey.

Dovey burst upon us in a heat. He was as straightforward a man as ever lived, of an intensely honest nature, and could no more have kept it in, now that he knew it, than he could have given up all righteous dealing together. His chief concern was to tell the truth, and to restore peace to his wife. He went through the narrative to Duffham without stopping; and seemed not in the least to care for my being present.

"It ain't *possible*, sir; there ain't a moral *possibility* that any o' that there dratted powder could ha' come anigh the babies," wound up Dovey. "I'd be thankful, sir, if you'd come down and quieten her a bit; her be in a fine way."

What with surprise and what with the man's rapid speech, Duffham had not taken in the one half of the tale. He had simply sat behind the tea-pot and stared.

"My good fellow, I don't understand," he said. "A pocketful of poison! What on earth made her take poison to George Reed's?"

So Dovey went over the heads of the story again. "'Twere in her pocket, sir, it's true: but the chances is that at that time the paper hadn't burst. None of it *couldn't* ha' got to them there two young ones."

To see the blacksmith's earnestness was good. His face was as eager, his tone as imploring as though he were pleading for his life.

"And it 'ud be a work o' charity, sir, if you'd just step down and see her. I'd pay handsome for the visit, sir; anything you please to charge. She's like one a going right out of her mind."

"I'll come," said Duffham: who had his curiosity upon the point. And the blacksmith set out on the run home again. Which brings us back a bit.

"Well, this is a curious start!" said Duffham to himself.

"Could the beetle-powder have poisoned the children?" I asked.

"I don't know, Johnny. It is an odd tale altogether. We will go down and inquire into it."

Which of course implied that he expected me to go with him. Nothing loath, was I; more eager than he.

Swallowing what was left of the tea and bread-and-butter, we went on to Piefinch-Cut. Ann Dovey was alone, save for her husband and mother. She flung herself on the sofa when she saw us—the blacksmith's house was comfortably off for furniture—and began to shriek.

"Now just you stop that, Ann Dovey," said Duffham, who was always short with hysterics. "I want to come to the bottom of this business; you can't tell it me while you scream. What in the world possessed you to go about with your pocket full of poison?"

She had her share of sense, and knew Duffham was not one to be trifled with; so she told the tale as well as she could for sobs.

"Have you mentioned this out of doors?" was the first question Duffham asked when it was over.

"No," interposed Dovey. "I telled 'em not to be soft enough for that. Not a soul have heard it, sir; but her"—pointing to the old mother—"and you and Master Johnny. We don't want to get all the parish swarming about us like so many hornets."

"Good," said Duffham. "But it is rather a serious thing, I fear. Uncertain at any rate."

"Be it, sir?" returned Ann, raising her heavy eyes questioningly. "Do you think so?"

"Why, you see, the mischief must have lain between that beetle-powder and Crew's pills. As Crew is so careful a man, I don't think it could have been the pills; and that's the truth."

"But how could the beedle-powder have got anigh the children out of my pocket, sir?" she asked, her face scarlet, her eyes wild. "I never put my hand into my pocket, while I sat there; I never did."

"You can't be sure of that," retorted Duffham. "We may put our hands into our pockets fifty times a day without remembering it."

"D'you suppose, sir, I should take out some o' that there beedle-powder and cram it down the poor innocents' throats?" she demanded, on the verge of further screams.

"Where is the powder?" questioned Duffham.

The powder was where it had been all along: in the gown pocket. Want of opportunity, through fear of Dovey's eyes, or dread of touching the stuff, had kept her from meddling with it. When she took the gown off the night of the inquest, she hung it up on the accustomed hook in the garret, and there it was still. The old mother went and brought it forward, handling it gingerly: a very smart print gown with bright flowers upon it.

Duffham looked round, saw a tin pie-dish, and turned the pocket inside out into it. A speckled kind of powder, brown and white. He plunged his fingers into it fearlessly, felt it, and smelt it. The blue paper it had been sold in lay amid it, cracked all across. Duffham took it up.

"Poison!" read out he aloud, gazing at the large letters through his

spectacles. "How came you to let it break open in your pocket, Ann Dovey?"

"I didn't let it; it braked of itself," she sobbed. "If you saw the black-beedles we gets here of a night, sir, your legs 'ud be fit to dance a hornpipe, they would. The floor be covered with 'em.

"If the ceiling was covered with 'em too, I'd not have that there dangerous stuff brought into the place—and so I've telled ye," roared Dovey.

"It's frightful uncomfortable, is black beedles; mother knows it," said his wife in a subdued voice—for Dovey in great things was master. "I thought if I just sprinkled a bit on't down, it 'ud take 'em away, and couldn't hurt nobody?"

"And you went off on the sly that there Tuesday night and bought it," he retorted; "and come back and telled me you had been to Reed's a helping to physic the babies."

"And so I had been there, a helping to physic 'em."

"Did you go straight to Reed's from the shop—with this powder?" asked Duffham.

"It were right at the bottom o' my pocket: I put it there as soon as Dame Chad had served me with it," sobbed Ann Dovey. "And I can be upon my Bible oath, Dr. Duffham, I never touched it after; and I don't believe it had burst then. A coming hasty out o' Reed's back gate, for I were in a hurry to get home here, the side o' me where the pocket is swung again the post, and I think the blue paper must ha' burst then. I never knowed it had burst, for I'd never thought no more about the beedles, till I put on the gown to go up to the inquest. Master Johnny, you be a staring at me fearful, but I be telling nothing but the naked truth."

She did seem to be telling the truth. And as to my "staring at her fearful," that was just her imagination. I was listening to the talk from the elbow of the easy wooden chair, where I had perched myself. Duffham recommended Dovey to put the tin dish and its contents away safely, so that it did not get near any food, but not to destroy the stuff just yet. He talked a bit with Ann, left her a composing draught, and came away.

"I don't see that the powder could have had anything to do with the children's death," I said to him as we went along.

"Neither do I, Johnny?"

"Shall you have to declare this at the inquest to-morrow, Mr. Duffham?"

"I'm sure I don't know," he answered, looking up at the sky overhead through his spectacles, just as a perplexed owl might do. "It might only serve to complicate matters: and I don't think it's possible it could have been the powder. On the other hand, if it be proved not to have been the pills, we have only this poisonous powder to

fall back upon. It is a strange affair altogether, take it in all its bearings."

I did not answer. The evening star was beginning to show itself in the sky.

"I must feel my way in this, Johnny: be guided by circumstances," he resumed, when we halted at the stile that led across the fields to the Manor. "We must watch the turn matters take to-morrow at the inquest. Of course if I find it necessary to declare it, I shall declare it. Meanwhile, lad, you had better not mention it to anybody."

"All right, Mr. Duffham. Good evening."

The jury went straggling into the Silver Lion by twos and threes. Up dashed the gig of the coroner, as before, he and his clerk seated side by side. All the parish had collected about the doors, and tried to push into the inquest-room.

Gliding quietly in, before the proceedings were opened, came Abel Crew in his handsome quaint velvet suit, his silver hair shining in the sunlight, his pale face calm as marble. The coroner ordered him to sit on a certain chair, and whispered to old Jones. Upon which the constable turned his gouty legs round, marched up, and stood guard over Crew, just as though Abel were his prisoner.

"Do you see that, sir?" I whispered to Duffham.

"Yes, lad, and understand it. Crew's pills have been analysed—officially this time, as the jury put it—and found to contain arsenic. Pettipher was right. The pills killed the children."

Well, you might have sent me down with a flash of moonshine. I had been fully trusting in Crew's innocence.

About the first witness called, and sworn, was the professional man from a distance who had analysed the pills. He said that they contained arsenic. Not in sufficient quantity to kill a grown person; more than sufficient to kill a little child. The coroner drew in his lips.

"I thought it must be so," he said, apparently for the benefit of the jury. "Am I to understand that these were improper pills to send out?—pills that no medical man would be likely to send?"

"Not improper at all, sir," replied the witness. "A medical man would prescribe them for certain cases. Not for children: to a child one would be what it has been here—destruction."

I felt a nudge at my elbow, and turned to see the Squire's hot face close to mine.

"Johnny, don't you ever stand up for that Crew again, mind. He ought to be hanged."

But the coroner, after a bit, seemed puzzled—or, rather, doubtful. Led to be so, perhaps, by a question put by one of the jury. It was Perkins the butcher.

"If these pills were furnished by Abel Crew for Hester Reed, a growed woman, and she went and gave one of her own accord to the two babies, ought Crew to be held responsible for that?"

Upon which there ensued some cavilling. Some of the jury holding that he was *not* responsible; others that he was. The coroner reminded them of what Hester Reed had stated in her evidence—that she had asked Crew's opinion about the suitability of the pills for children, and he had told her they were suitable.

Hester Reed was called. As the throng parted to make way for her to advance, I saw Ann Dovey seated at the back of the room, looking more dead than alive. Dovey stood by her, having made himself spruce for the occasion. Ann would have gone off a mile in some opposite direction, but old Jones's orders to all the witnesses of the former day, to appear again, had been peremptory. They had been wanted before, he told them, and might be wanted again.

"You need not look such a scare-crow with fright," I whispered in Ann Dovey's ear, making my way to her side to reassure her, the woman was so evidently miserable. "It was the pills that did the mischief, after all—didn't you hear? Nothing need come out about your pocket and the powder."

"Master Johnny, I'm just about skeered out o' my life, I am. Fit to go and drown myself."

"Nonsense! It will be all right as far as you are concerned."

"I said it was Crew's pills, all along, I did; it couldn't have been anything else, sir. All the same, I wish I was dead."

As good as to try to comfort a post, seemingly, as Ann Dovey. I went back to my standing-place between the Squire and Duffham. Hester Reed was being questioned then.

"Yes, sir, it were some weeks ago. My little boy, George, was ailing, and I ran out o' the house to Abel Crew, seeing the old man go past the gate, and asked whether I might give him one of them there same pills, or whether it would hurt the child. Crew said I might give it freely; he said two even wouldn't hurt him."

"And did you give the pill?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir. He's a rare bad one to give physic to, Georgy is, and I let him get well without it."

"How old is he?"

"Turned of three, sir."

"You are quite, absolutely certain, Mrs. Reed, that these pills, from which you took out two to give the deceased children, were the very self-same pills you had from Abel Crew?"

"I be sure and certain of it, sir. Nobody never put a finger upon the box but me. It stood all the while in that there corner o' the press-shelf in the children's bed-room. Twice a week when I got upon a chair to dust the shelf I see it there. There was nobody in the house

but me; except the little ones. My husband don't concern himself with the places and things."

Circumstantial evidence could not well go farther. Mrs. Reed was dismissed, and the coroner told Abel Crew to come near the table. He did as he was bid, and stood there upright and manly, a gentle look on his face.

"You have heard the evidence, Abel Carew," said the coroner. "The pills have been analysed and found to contain a certain portion of arsenic—a great deal more than enough to kill a child. What have you to say to it?"

"Only this, sir: only what I said before. That the pills analysed were not my pills. The pills I gave to Mrs. Reed contained neither arsenic nor any other poison."

"It is showing great obstinacy on your part to repeat that," returned the coroner impatiently. "Mrs. Reed swears that the pills were the same pills; and she evidently speaks the truth."

"I am sure she thinks she speaks it," replied Abel, gently. "Nevertheless, sir, I assure you she is mistaken. In some way the pills must have been changed while in her possession; box and all."

"Why, man, in what manner, do you suppose, they could have been changed?"

"I don't know, sir. All I do know is, that the pills and the box produced here last week were not, either of them, the pills and the box she had from me. Never a box went out from me, sir, but it had my private mark on it—the mark I spoke of. Jones the constable searched my place while I was detained in the Lock-up, and took away all the pill-boxes out of it. Let him testify whether he found one without the mark."

At this juncture a whole cargo of pill-boxes were shot out of a bag on the table by old Jones, some empty, some filled with pills. The coroner and jury set on to examine them, and found the mark on all lids and boxes.

"And if you'd be so good as cause the pills to be analysed, sir, they would be found perfectly free from poison," resumed Abel. "They are made from herbs that possess healing properties, not irritant; a poisonous herb, whether poisonous in itself, or one from which poison may be extracted, I never plucked. Believe me, sir, for I am telling the truth; the truth before Heaven."

The coroner said nothing for a minute or two: I think the words impressed him. He began lifting the lid again from one or two of the boxes.

"What are these pills for? All for the same disorder?"

"They were made up for different disorders, sir."

"And pray how do you distinguish them?"

"I cannot distinguish them now. They have been mixed. Even if

returned to me, I should not venture to use them. I have a piece of furniture at home, sir, that I call my Pill-case. It has various drawers in it, each drawer being labelled with the sort of pills kept in it: camomile, dandelion, and so on. Mr. Jones must be able to corroborate this."

Old Jones nodded. He had never seen nothing neater nor more exact in all his life, than the keeping o' them there pills. He, Mr. Jones, had tumbled the drawerfuls indiscriminately into his bag, and so mixed them.

"And they will be so much loss to me," quietly observed Abel. "It does not matter."

"Were you brought up to the medical profession?" cried the coroner—and some of us thought he put the question in irony.

"No, sir," replied Abel, taking it to be serious. "I have learnt the healing art, as supplied by herbs and roots, and I know their value. Herbs will cure sometimes where the regular doctor fails. I have myself cured cases with them that the surgeons could not cure; cases that but for me, under God, might never have been cured in this world. I make no boast of it; anybody else might do as much who had made herbs their study, as I have."

"Are you making a fortune by it?" went on the coroner.

Abel shook his head. "I have a small income of my own, sir, and it is enough for my simple wants. What little money I make by my medicines, and honey, and that—it is not much—I find uses for in other ways. I indulge in a new book now and then; and there are many poor around who need a bit of help sometimes."

"You 'read' the stars, I am told, Abel Crew. What do you read in them?"

"The same that I read, sir, in all other of nature's works: God's wonderful hand. His wisdom, His power, His omnipotent providence."

Perhaps the coroner thought to bring Abel to self-ridicule in his replies: if so, it was a mistake, for he seemed to be getting the worst of it himself. At any rate, he quitted the subject abruptly, brushed his energy up, and began talking to the jury.

The drift of the conversation being, so far as the room could hear it, that Crew's pills, and only Crew's, could have been the authors of the mischief to the two deceased children, whose bodies they were sitting upon, and that Crew must be committed to take his trial for manslaughter. And, committed he would have been in a few minutes longer.

"Hester Reed's evidence is so clear and positive that it quite puts aside any suspicion of the box of pills having been changed ——"

"The box had not my mark upon it, sir," respectfully spoke Abel Crew, his tone anxious.

"Don't interrupt me," rebuked the coroner sharply. "As to the

box not having what he calls his private mark upon it," he went on to the jury, "that in my opinion tells little. Because a man has put a mark on fifty pill-boxes, he is not obliged to have put it on the fifty-first. An unintentional omission is readily made. It appears to me——"

"Am I in time? Is it all over? Is Abel Crew found guilty?"

This unceremonious interruption to the official speech came from a woman's voice. The door of the room was pushed open with a fling, considerably discomposing those who had their backs against it and were taken unawares, and the room was pushed right and left by the struggles of somebody to get to the front. The coroner looked daggers; old Jones lifted his staff; but the intruder forced her way forward with resolute equanimity. Cathy Reed: we never remembered to call her Parrifer. Cathy in her Sunday-going gown and a pink bonnet.

"How dare you?" cried the coroner. "What do you mean by this? Who are you?"

"I have come rushing over from Tewkesbury to clear Abel Crew," returned Cathy, getting up her breath after the fight. "The pills that killed the children were my pills."

The commotion this avowal caused in the room was beyond describing. The coroner stared, the jury all turned to look at the speaker, the crowd trod upon one another.

"And sorry to my heart I am that it should have been so," went on Cathy. "I loved those two dear little ones as if they were my own, and I'd rather my pills had killed myself. Just look at that, please, Mr. Coroner."

The ease with which Cathy spoke to the official gentleman, the coolness with which she put down a pill-box on the green cloth before him, took the room by surprise. As Ann Dovey remarked later, "She must ha' learnt that there manner in her travels with young Parrifer."

"What is this?" questioned the coroner curtly, picking up the box.

"Perhaps you'll ask Crew whether he knows it or not, sir, afore I say what it is," returned Cathy.

The coroner had opened it. It contained seven pills; just the size of the other pills, and looking exactly like them. On the lid and on the box was the private mark spoken of by Abel Crew.

"That is my box, sir; and these—I am certain of it—are my pills," spoke Abel, earnestly, bending over the shoulder of the topmost jurymen to look into the box. "The box and the pills that I gave to Mrs. Reed."

"And so they are, Abel Crew," rejoined Cathy, emphatically. "The week afore last, which I was spending at home, I changed the one pill-box for the other, inadvertent, you see,"—with a nod to the coroner—"and took the wrong box away with me. And I wish both boxes had been in the sea afore I'd done it."

Cathy was ordered to give her account more clearly, and did so. She had been suffering from illness, accompanied by neuralgia, and a doctor at Tewkesbury had prescribed some pills for it, one to be taken occasionally. The chemist who made them up told her they contained arsenic. He was about to write the directions on the box, when Cathy, who was in a desperate hurry, snatched it from him, saying she could not wait for that bother, flung down the money, and departed. This box of pills she had brought with her on her visit to her father's, lest she should find occasion to take one; and she had put it on the shelf of the press, side by side with the other pill-box, to be out of the way of the children. Upon leaving, she took up the wrong box inadvertently: carrying away Abel Crew's pills, leaving hers. There lay the explanation of the mystery of the fatal mistake. Mrs. Reed had not known that Cathy had any pills with her, the girl, who was just as light-headed as ever, not having chanced to mention it: and Cathy had the grace to dust the room herself while she was there.

"When father and his wife sent me word about the death of the two little twins, and that it was some pills of Abel Crew's that had done it, I never once thought o' my pills," added Cathy. "They didn't as much as come into my head. But late last night I had lent to me last Saturday's *Worcester Herald*, and there I read the inquest, and what Crew had said about the marks he put on his pill-boxes, and mother's evidence about never having shifted the pill-box from its place atop o' the press. Sure and I couldn't have changed them boxes, thought I to myself; and upstairs I ran in a fright to look at the box I had brought away. Yes, there it was; Abel Crew's box with the marks on it; and I knew then that I had left my own pills at home, and that they had killed the babies. As soon as I could get away this morning—which was not as soon as I wanted to—I started to come over here. And that's the story—and the blessed truth."

Of course it was the truth. Abel's beautiful face had a glow of light upon it. "I knew I should be cleared in God's good time," he breathed. The Squire pounced upon him, and shook both his hands, as if he'd never let them go again. Duffham held out his.

So that was the end of the story. Cathy got a reprimand from the coroner for her carelessness, and burst into tears in his face.

"And thee come off home, wi' thee, and see me chuck that there powder into the fire; and don't go making a spectacle o' th' self again," cried Dovey sharply in his wife's ear. "Thee just let me catch thee a bringing in more o' the dratted stuff; that's all."

"I shall never look at a black beedle again, Jack, without shivering," she answered; going in for a slight instalment of the shivering there and then. "It might ha' come to hanging. Leastways that's what I've been a dreaming of."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

A WORD FOR OUR MILITIA.

EVERY year about a hundred regiments of Militia are called out for twenty-eight days' training. Four or five hundred men, obedient to the annual summons, come from their homes to the different towns selected for this yearly training.

They are all billeted about these towns; two to ten men in a house, not always the most respectable—not always in the most respectable streets; chiefly young men under five-and-twenty.

Is this the only town, and am I the only woman who never thought of doing anything towards their comfort or improvement? I wish I could believe it, but I fear there are numbers of women like myself who, in fact, rather dread the invasion of the Militia; who expect to see them filling the public-houses, and crowding the footpaths when off duty.

For myself, I confess it never occurred to me that I was in any way "my brother's keeper," so far as *they* were concerned, until a friend lent me a little book called "Active Service," written by a friend of Miss Robinson. (It costs one shilling. Pray buy it.)

It tells of what she has done and is doing for our soldiers. Many must have heard her name, and many may remember she was thanked by the officers, after the last Autumn Manœuvres, for the success of her good work. They had never had so little drunkenness among their men. I determined, when our Militia came this spring, I would try to follow in her train, though very far behind, yet to set foot on the same road; and if only *one* young fellow was saved from drinking, should I not have cause to be thankful?

Next year, please God, it will be better done and better organized. This time, as most of the men came from Birmingham, there was a dread of small-pox: nothing was arranged beforehand, and the men had been a week in the town before the room was taken.

The only public-house here where *drink* is not allowed, (where a working-man can go in for an hour and read, have a cheap cup of coffee at any hour, or his bit of meat cooked for him,) has a large upper room, and this was hired. Printed papers were distributed, saying there was a Reading Room for the Militia, open from 11 to 1 o'clock, and from 6 to 9 in the evening. On Tuesday, the 9th June, taking with me, as Miss Robinson advises, writing-paper, envelopes, picture-cards, and stamps, I took a chair at the end of the long room, a little before six, and waited. Many ladies had taken up the idea and helped readily with money, with books and papers, games of chess, draughts, dominoes, and solitaire. The room is a good size and airy; two large windows,

always open. Large texts and maps cover the walls, and the only picture is one of our Queen.

"My noble heart went pit a pat" as I heard steps on the stairs, and two redcoats made their appearance. One, a young fellow about two and-twenty; the other older. I rose and welcomed them, and they took their seats. I followed Miss Robinson as well as I could, showed the writing-materials and picture-cards; asked if they wished to send money home. Young D. said he would come on Friday and send some to his mother; he came almost every day, and on Friday brought two shillings, which I exchanged for stamps, wrote his letter, and enclosed them.

I told them we all hoped they would find the room a comfort. They might write, or read, or amuse themselves quietly; all we required was attention to the rules of the house fastened on the wall, which are, that no noise, swearing, or bad language, and no intoxicating liquors, are allowed. They asked for copy-books, and began to write, after looking at the "Graphic" and other illustrated papers; and D. said how glad he was there was a room to come to; he was not very comfortable at his billet.

Next day more than a dozen men came, two or three in the morning, but the greater number in the evening. Many asked me to write their letters. Those who could write themselves brought the envelopes to be directed, admiring my writing when I had addressed them.

I told them about Miss Robinson. I showed the picture-cards, and said stamps would go between two safely home, and I could give stamps for their money. I was quite pleased when six hot pennies were pulled out. I let them choose the picture-card or the sheet of paper on which their letter was to be written. I had brought paper with woodcuts of different celebrated places, such as you get at the sea-side, and was always asked not to write on the back of the picture, "as they would like to frame it at home."

I never could stay later than seven, so I told them all to come early when they wanted letters written; sometimes a scribe among them would write for himself or a friend, but in general they all came to me to write to their mother, father, wife, or "the young woman as I'm keeping company with." I think they liked my asking explanation of the different sentences I had to write, such as, "Mind and keep Tommy out of the road."

"Who is Tommy?" I said.

"My little boy; he's over two-and-a-half, and he's always running out and getting in the way of the horses, so I'm telling my wife to keep an eye on him."

And D., writing to his mother, after asking for his sister and her child, "Tell Dick to mind his schooling," (then in parenthesis) "I wish I had minded mine more, so that I could write myself now."

"And who is Dick?"

"Dick's a little lad that lives near us, and he's always running into our house when I'm at home," said the young soldier with a smile. Simple words that told their own tale; told that the tall young fellow had in some way won the little lad's love.

"How pleased Dick would be to see you in your red coat," I said. "Suppose we send him a picture-card or a book for himself?" So a monthly part of the "Chatterbox" went directed to Dick Hodges, *Junior*, for fear the said Dick's father, also called Dick, should think it was for *him*. Several letters I wrote that mother: "and please tell her I'm going on all right," was in every one. Mothers' hearts are all the same, and one felt the pleasure those few words would give. He brought me the mother's answers to read, and they ended with, "Thank the lady very much for her kindness from your loving mother."

"Mother's a tidy scholar," he said, "but I never cared for school when I was a little one."

One evening, when the regular comers had got over any awkwardness they might have felt with me at first, a new man arrived, anxious to write to his wife; he could not write himself, and he was shy with me: he wanted Corporal C. to write for him, but Corporal C. was busy writing for a young fellow. Some very interesting document it was evidently. I had to direct the envelope, but it was the corporal brought it to me, not the young fellow himself, and it was to a Miss Mary Watson!

The new arrival was in a hurry, and I was pleased to hear the other men telling him, "Go to the *missus*, she'll write it for you"—"I tell you the *missus* will write it the minute you ask her," &c.; so at last he made his way to my end of the table and told me what to say. He wanted to send his wife some money, which the sergeant would advance him, so, with the letter all ready, and card inside, he went off to the sergeant, thanking me and wishing me good-night.

We ladies had discussed among ourselves whether these men would like one of us among them, or whether they would prefer having the room to themselves; so the second or third day, when there were seven or eight men present, I stopped as I was going away, and told them our doubts. Having Miss Robinson's experience in my mind, I said, *I* thought they would like to be looked after when they were away from their homes, adding, "I have sons of my own, serving the Queen far away from me, and I am thankful for any kindness shown *them*, so, if I can help any of you, I am quite ready and willing." They all said, "We like you to come very much, m'm, and are very much obliged to you."

My constant conversation between the letter writing was on drinking. "Do take your pay home with you," I said; "*don't send it to the devil before you leave the town.*"

The little book, "Buy Your Own Cherries," was a great favourite—a twopenny book, with a large bunch of red cherries outside; and "Does

it Answer? A Word to Soldiers," by Miss Robinson's friend, was often read.

Twenty men were from Birmingham, many of them under three-and-twenty. There was never a word spoken that could be found fault with, and the people of the house were loud in their praises. There had been a fear lest a party of Militia might not make the house pleasant to the regular comers in the reading-room below, but they all behaved with the greatest order and civility, staying on till nine o'clock, reading or playing games. I feel sure they will find a hearty welcome next spring, and that when the room is better known, there will be many more anxious to avail themselves of it.

Probably one reason for the good behaviour is, that only the steady fellows come; and I must say for these young men, that not one of them ever came into my presence smoking, which was more than could be said of their superiors in rank, I am quite sure. I know of one town where not only the men for their twenty-eight days, but the recruits for their *three months*, have been looked after every evening from six to nine for some years, the head of a large shop and her daughters devoting most of their evenings to the work; there are many other voluntary teachers, and numbers of the young fellows have learnt to read and write through their kindness. One year the men presented her with a Bible; they have all as a rule behaved well, and been most grateful to her.

Another year I trust there will be regular management and a regular number of ladies, each taking their turn two or three times a week. They would find plenty to do, for many wanted a reading lesson as well as a writing lesson, after the letters were written and posted. Of course there should be one of a certain age or position to superintend every evening: and some women, who excel with girls or at mothers' meetings, might not be so well fitted as others to speak to or teach young men. For myself, I prefer a set of rough boys to the demurest class of good little girls that ever was found. A mother, with her heart full of her own boy, will say a kind word of advice to a young fellow, and touch the soft place in his heart, better perhaps than anyone else, and perhaps, as no words are forgotten before God, bring a blessing on her own darling,

"Roaming in youth's uncertain wild."

I should be glad to have the subject considered and suggestions offered. All I can say is I tried to do my best in the short time I had. From twelve to one, and from six to seven, was all I could give; and Mrs. B., the widow of a clergyman, accustomed to parish work, came whenever her health allowed her, and she had a Bible class on the two Sundays. The first Sunday there was only young D.; the second, he was there and four others, all young. They were quite interested in the account

of David longing for the cool fresh water from his own well at Bethlehem, and the three brave men breaking through the enemy to bring it. Again following Miss Robinson's example, I talked of the good soldiers in the Bible, and read the beautiful bit about young Asahel, "who was as fleet of foot as a young roe."

It was agreed to give the thirty men who had frequented the room a tea-drinking on the day of the review. And by the way, when I was settling with our baker's wife, and speaking of the men, she told me, two or three years ago, four young militiamen were billeted in the house opposite her. "They used often to buy little things from me," she said, "and no men could have behaved more properly. One was married, and his wife did not like being left at Birmingham alone, so she came with him. She used to ask me to give her a bit of work that she might earn enough to pay her railway fare; so I let her scour out the shop for me. Poor young woman! she wasn't far from being laid up, and wasn't quite fit for that work; but she was so anxious to get a little money together, she would do it, poor thing."

Ah me! I thought, was that all the youngwife deserved from us, whose husband was training for his country's service? Lazarus had been at *my* door, and I knew it not.

Our tea-drinking was announced for half-past six; but, as some of the men could not come before eight, we did not begin till then. All who had arrived early were perfectly quiet and interested whilst I read aloud one of the S. P. C. K. books, "*Anne Gale's Story*." Four men at the far end of the room left their games, and joined the circle to listen.

There was some pork-pie and some cake for each man; but what they thought most of was some strawberries; and, with a view of impressing my horror of drink, I brought in a large round basket of cherries, and, holding it up for them all to see, I said, "Buy your own cherries, remember." There was a hum of applause, and several men said "The best book that ever was written." Good Mrs. B., with her kind face and white hair, like Mary of old, thinking of the better part, went round saying a word of good counsel to each, and I noticed how quietly and attentively they listened. Several other ladies were present helping in various ways. We had pretty blue Prayer-books for the five who had attended the Bible class, and a story-book for each of the others.

One said, "Please, m'm, if you don't mind, give me '*Our Father's Care*,' Mrs. Sewell's ballad, with coloured pictures."

At nine we all sang "God save the Queen," as they must be in their quarters by half-past nine. "Please, m'm," said young D., lingering till the last, "let me have '*Anne Gale's Story*' for little Dick, will you?"

I feel certain, by the hearty shake as each man took my hand, that the kind feelings awakened by those evenings in that room will not

soon be forgotten or die away ; and I feel certain that such little acts of kindness towards one branch of our noble army (surely due to men training to shed their blood, if need be, for us), is one way of fulfilling the royal law, hitherto among the many, many things left undone that we ought to have done—is one way in which the women of England, in a womanly way, by the all-powerful gentle influence of woman, can help to close the great gulf between the different grades in our great towns.

“ For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

One way of knitting together the different members into one glorious body, into one fold, under one Shepherd—or rather, one great army, under the one great Captain of our Salvation, who will reward all His faithful soldiers at the last, in the land that is very far off—even that land where there shall be no need to learn war any more.



TO A SEA-SHELL.

THY pink lip has been kissed by ocean spray,
And blooms the brighter for the fond embrace—
How oft repeated he that loves may say—
Whose tender memory time will not efface.
Is not thine ear still filled with the soft grace
Of many a whispered vow and dulcet lay,
Which greeted thee by happy night and day
In the long past ; in some far distant place ?
Yes, for thy lip is murmuring in thy sleep
The secrets told thee by thy kingly love ;
We hear the echo of the mighty deep
If close thy dainty form we bend above :
Can time or space resist the earnest will ?
Is not thy dear one's presence with thee still ?

EMMA RHODES.

JENNY MORRIS'S VOYAGE.

"WELL, then, there is nothing left for me to do but to go out to California!"

The young lady who had arrived at this sudden determination and thus avowed it, was a pretty girl of twenty-three, or thereabouts, with a graceful, well-developed form, a bright face, and a clear blushing complexion. She stood in the middle of her Aunt Morris's dining-room, with an open letter in her hand, and an expression of annoyance contracting her broad clear brow. Her aunt, who was a timid little woman, with a timid voice, only ventured one remark in reply to this avowed resolution. It was, "Yes." But if ever that monosyllable expressed doubt, astonishment, dismay, and terror, it did so as it dropped slowly from Aunt Morris's trembling lips. The state of the case was this. Jenny Morris and her twin-sister, Elsie, were orphans, to whom this same timid, flurried woman, although an old maid herself, had been as true and efficient an adopted mother as if she had been six feet high, and with the resolution of an Amazon. They lived together in the suburbs of our great city, in a secluded sort of way, being people of a good deal of pride and taste, and not unbounded means. They had a pleasant little circle of friends around them, retiring as they were, and read a great deal about the world, while they saw very little of it.

Between one and two years ago, Jenny Morris had received the first great shock of her life. The sudden blow came from a dear hand—that of her sister Elsie.

They were sitting together one evening, laughing about a large party they had been at the night before, and Jenny was speaking in much disparagement of a young man they had met there; one Mr. Edward West, recently from California.

"And the absurd attention he paid to you, Elsie! I pitied you extremely——"

Something in Elsie's pretty face made her sister pause and start. A blushing smile, a glance, half confused, half proud, met her own, and then Elsie caught her hand and held it to her heart.

"It is not the first time we have met him, by a good many, as you know, Jane. And—and it is quite a week now since it happened; only I could not tell you."

"Since what happened?" asked Jenny, in a dreadful fear—for she guessed it but too well.

Mr. West, who had fallen in love with Elsie Morris, and she with him, had received her promise to become his wife. As the blow, of hearing this, fell upon Jenny, she turned as white as death, and thought she

would rather have died than heard it. For Mr. West was returning to the golden land again, and would want to take Elsie with him. Even so.

That was the bitter drop in the cup, and it made a gloomy shadow fall upon the happy household that not all the wedding preparations and finery could dispel. The day of parting brought pangs those who have not loved and clung to one another for years, as those three simple-minded, warm-hearted women had, can never realize. And the wedding day passed over, and carried away Elsie.

It was over now, and had been for months upon months. Mr. and Mrs. West had sailed for San Francisco, and reached it in safety; but poor Jenny had remained desolate.

The open letter now in her hand seemed to renew the sorrow, and bring back again the heart-breaking scene. Elsie was ill, she wrote—too ill to tell of; and she was frightfully nervous at a time of peril that was approaching. And Mr. West added a sealed scrap to the letter, saying that there were fears for his wife, and she was constantly sobbing for Jenny.

To read of this distress, and not make an effort to help her, was not in Jenny Morris's nature; so after looking at her little aunt's tearfully sympathetic face for a minute or two without speaking, she broke out at last with the sentence above written,—

"Well, then, there's nothing left for me but to go to California!"

Aunt Morris could only look up in feeble distress, with an expression of helpless grief, and then take shelter in her pocket-handkerchief and silent tears.

"Yes," said Jenny, "I know it's terrible; but what is to be done? Poor Elsie must not be left alone in her time of need. Suppose—Aunt Morris, you hear what Edward says—suppose she were to die."

"With all the haste in the world, you would hardly be in time, Jenny."

"Oh, yes I should, aunt. And haste I will make. Elsie wrote, she says, nearly as soon as she knew of it herself. Miss Nevill shall come and stay with you, aunt."

Jenny was looked upon by her aunt and sister as possessing gigantic strength of character and force of will, qualities of which they were both totally destitute. If anything had ever to be decided she decided it at once, with a fiat from which there was no appeal. There was something positively wonderful to them in her determination of manner, and she had gradually come to be considered as full of strange experience of the world, although she had never gone five miles from the place where she was born.

"You know best, dear, of course; but, is not the voyage to California looked upon as a dangerous one?" asked Aunt Morris.

"Why, it has been made by thousands safely, so I can't see how it

can be so. But, to tell you the truth, I know nothing about it; I never thought I should need to; but I'll begin to inform myself of all things without delay."

"You can never go alone, my dear!"

"I *must*, aunt—unless I can find anyone to go with," was Jenny's answer. "Think of Elsie."

"Is there no hope for this?—no turning you, Jenny?"

"None, aunt. To go is an imperative duty."

"Then, my child—oh dear! that I should have to tell you—I do know of someone who is going. And that's Mrs. Webb. I met her the day before that dreadful letter came. She informed me that she was going out there to join her husband."

Jenny's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, aunt, it is the very thing!"

Miss Morris only groaned. It was simply appalling.

Jenny, in the abstract, did not much like Mrs. Webb, but, as an escort to California, she seemed all that could be desired. She was not very much older than Jenny. Mr. Webb had gone out some two years before, had been successful in his speculations there, and she was now about to join him. Jenny put on her things, and went forthwith to Mrs. Webb's house, and found her busy and triumphant.

"Oh, Jenny, it is charming to have you with me as a companion. I thought I should only have old Mr. Bumble. He's very kind and all that, but you know he is like my grandfather."

"Mr. who?" said Jenny.

"Mr. Bumble."

"He must be brother to Charles Dickens's Bumble," cried Jenny, laughing.

"He is going out there about a patent for some mining shaft, and is to take care of me. He takes all the arrangements for me upon himself, and so he will for you; ship, passage, berth, everything. You will have nothing to do but get your outfit."

"I hope—of course—we shall go in the quickest manner possible," said Jenny.

"Of course," replied Mrs. Webb, emphatically. "Do you think Mr. Bumble, with all his experience, does not know what he is about, Jenny? You may implicitly trust him for all things.—As I do."

With this comfortable assurance, Jenny Morris went home with a mind at rest. No time was lost over her own preparations. In fact, there was no time to lose; for the ship chosen by Mr. Bumble was to sail at once.

"He is a perfect treasure," said Mrs. Webb. "We need never see the ship at all till we join it."

As the time was so short, they were to go down by rail, and join the ship on her finally sailing from the last port she touched at. Jenny

Morris was terribly low-spirited the night before, the last night of her stay on land; and her aunt saw it.

"No, aunt; I am not afraid of the voyage. It is not that: Mr. Bumble writes word that it will be quite a pleasure trip. And the thought of seeing Elsie again is delightful. But no one can leave their home, and embark for a far-off unknown land, without feeling it."

"Who knows, Jenny, but you will pick up a husband on the voyage?" cried Lucy Elderton, who, with other of Jenny's young friends, had come to see the last of her. "The passengers sometimes are very nice——"

"*Lucy!*" interrupted Jenny, with the glance of an offended empress, "for goodness' sake don't make me lose my respect for you! How can you be so—so——"

"So what, Jenny?"

"Well, I was going to say coarse, Lucy. What have you ever seen in me to call up such an idea as that?" All the proprieties of life were sacred to Jenny Morris.

It was on a Saturday morning that Mrs. Webb and Jenny first saw the ship they were to sail by. She was called the *Lightning*. Jenny had passed a sleepless and weeping night, and nothing was left but to embark. Their luggage was already on board.

As they drove along the wharf, Jenny glanced at the piles of warehouses and the hurrying signs of business with the strange wonder one feels when bound on a long voyage, to see home interests speeding along unruffled and unchanged.

"Do you know much about ships, Mrs. Webb?"

"Never saw such a thing in my life, except at a distance," promptly responded that lady. "That is, I never was on board one. When William left for California he came down here to embark, and would not hear of my coming with him. I wish I did know something of them: it would be very comfortable to start with a little experience of sea life."

Jenny sighed, and looked doubtfully at a forest of masts that sprang up before them. The carriage suddenly stopped and turned round for them to alight.

"Oh, never fear," said Mrs. Webb, encouragingly, as she got out. "Mr. Bumble knows enough for both of us."

Mr. Bumble was on board waiting for them; an elderly gentleman with a round, red face.

"This way, my dears, this way," said he, with a most fatherly air. "I dare not get out of the boat, for I've had a job to get it. All the boats are in requisition this morning. Wind's fair, and many ships are going off."

They did not hear what he said in the trouble of getting into the little boat that was to row them to the ship. The ladies were utterly bewildered.

"Good gracious, Jenny!" cried Mrs. Webb, "do you mean to say a thing like this can go all the way to California?"

"Heaven knows," returned her friend, "but if it does I daresay we shall go in it."

Amidst all kinds of bustle and noise they reached the ship. It was a great tall black-looking vessel, up whose side was an impracticable ladder that people were scaling with great haste and disregard to appearances.

"We have not much time to lose," said Mr. Bumble. "The pilot says we are late as it is. Get up, young lady, get up."

"Oh, by all means," cried Jenny, in cheerful desperation; and giving Mrs. Webb an imploring glance to keep close behind her, began to mount the perpendicular ascent with blind courage. It was only a moment or so, though it seemed an age to the two women—and they stood on the deck of the vessel and took breath.

It was a scene of confusion. Ropes and men were everywhere. The shouts from one to another, the rushings about on all sides, the packages and the ropes they bumped against quite bewildered them.

"This way, my dear young friends, this way to your cabins," said good Mr. Bumble.

They gladly followed him. A small door, opening into what seemed a little house on deck, led them into a low room, with doors on each side, and a table in the centre. Towards the other end, near a small window in the wall, sat a gentleman, reading with great calmness, and seemingly at perfect ease. A pleasant-looking man who glanced up at them with a pair of nice grey eyes.

"There are your apartments," said Mr. Bumble, pointing to two doors bearing the respective Nos. 8 and 10 over them; and into them the ladies stepped: and as quickly stepped out again, confronting each other, and uttering the word "Apartments!" in an exclamatory tone of inquiry. Mr. Bumble had gone; and the gentleman sat reading quietly and undisturbed, so there was no one to answer it.

"Do you suppose—does he suppose," asked Mrs. Webb, in a tone of subdued despair, "that any Christian woman could dress herself or go to bed in such a salt-box as that? Why, my elbows touch the wall on either side. I never could get as much as my shoes off without opening the door!"

"Perhaps all the cabins are like this, and we shall have to make the best of it," said Jenny. "You know we promised not to be dismayed at trifles!"

"But who could have imagined it!—and the idea of his calling them apartments!" ejaculated the dismayed Mrs. Webb. Suddenly a bright thought struck her. "Jenny, let me see you go into your box and shut the door; and that will strengthen me to attempt mine."

This feat accomplished, the ladies with something like resignation

began to "make the best" of the places, and arrange their things. In the midst of it Mr. Bumble appeared, an amiable smile on his face.

"We are under weigh," he said, "getting out to sea, and the pilot's going. Would you not like to come on deck and take a last look at the old country?"

They both hastened out with him. In spite of Jenny's efforts at self-control, a great swelling lump rose in her throat. Her eyes were hot and full of tears as she looked over the side of the great vessel now in motion, and at the receding land, between which and her the broad blue water began to swell and widen.

Mrs. Webb sank down and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Jenny," she murmured, "this is indeed the last of home."

"Mr. Bumble," said Jenny, suddenly, a startling thought occurring to her, "there are a great many sails here, but where are the paddle-boxes?—where are the boilers?"

"There are none," replied Mr. Bumble, blandly.

"No paddle-boxes!—no boilers!" cried Jenny. "This is a steamer."

"Oh dear no, my dear young lady. This is not a steamer."

"Not a steamer!" echoed Jenny, starting up in alarm. "Then what in heaven's name is it?"

"It is the fast-sailing clipper ship, *Lightning*."

"Clipper! what is a clipper? Are we going to California, or are we not? Oh, Mr. Bumble, do not trifle with me."

"Trifle with you, my dear Miss Morris! Far be it from me to trifle with you, or any other respected young lady. We are going to California in the fast-sailing clipper, *Lightning*, by way of Cape Horn."

In speaking, afterwards, of the feelings awakened by Mr. Bumble's announcement, Jenny was wont to say that "she thought she should have gone raving mad. A sailing vessel—and round Cape Horn! Why, she might be four—five—ay, six months before they reached San Francisco! If ever they did reach it.

It all came of "trusting to Mr. Bumble." That estimable old gentleman, being given to the love of economy, had not looked out for the fleetest mode of sailing, but for the cheapest. The *Lightning* was a small and very inferior vessel in all ways, quite a third-class one; but her terms for the passage were extremely moderate. It was a frightful blow to Jenny.

Mrs. Webb did not seem to care about the mishap. In point of fact she could not be made to understand it. A month or two, more or less, on board was all the same to her. There was no help for it now; no redress. Mr. Bumble protested he had acted for what he thought the true interests of the ladies as well as his own: and poor Jenny Morris could only forgive him. As she had had to make the best of the little cabin, so she now had to make the best of the ship.

The next time she saw Mr. Bumble, something was decidedly the

matter with him. He was in his own cabin, the door propped back. It opened to the state cabin, and was near her own and Mrs. Webb's. A pale, greenish shade sat on his face, his hands hung limp, his head fell on one side, his eyes looked like those of a fish. Jenny glanced to the stranger, who was still reading quietly, in dismay. He coolly glanced back at her in return, and spoke a single word.

"Sea-sick."

"Oh, my dear young friend, pray come to me!" gasped Mr. Bumble. And Jenny, full of compassion, was hastening to him, when Mrs. Webb's cabin door was burst open with a bang, and that lady, greener in the face than Mr. Bumble, uttered a succession of moans.

"Oh, Jenny, my dear, come to me! Don't leave me, that's all I ask of you."

"Jenny Morris, Jenny Morris," cried that young lady to herself, "don't go crazy; that's all I ask of you."

And for the next two or three hours she had a fine time of it, running between the two. The old gentleman was gasping out for his "dear young friend," and for lemons, and hot water and brandy perpetually. Mrs. Webb held her tightly by the arm whenever she could get hold of it, gaspingly imploring of her to "let her die."

Thus the day wore on. Poor Jenny was getting exhausted when the stranger gentleman appeared before her with a cup of tea. "I am sure you must want it," he said.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Jenny, gratefully looking up at him. "I think I did want something. What is it that they are doing in the saloon there?"

"Laying supper. I thought you would like tea best."

"Indeed yes. Supper! But surely nobody will be able to eat!"

"Oh dear yes," he answered. "The captain and some of the passengers will—I for one."

"How is it you are so much at your ease in this rolling ship?"

"I made the voyage over not long ago, and got my sea legs on."

"Made it from California?"

"Yes. And as soon as I have supped, I will take that old gentleman off your hands for a bit. You will have more time to devote to the lady."

Jenny was heartily grateful to him; and by-and-by he came back and entered on the charge. She shut herself in with the other miserable patient—Mrs. Webb; and was bathing her head and fanning her brow, when the gentleman handed in a bowl of broken ice, and two flacons, one of brandy, the other of eau-de-cologne.

"How very kind he is!" thought Jenny.

Shortly afterwards, when Mrs. Webb was lying white and cold and motionless, a message came from Mr. Bumble—"Would she come to him at once?" Hastily crossing the cabin, she entered the little state room

that Mr. Bumble called his. He had caused the upper berth to be removed, and sat upright in the lower one, with a large green gown on, a lemon in one hand, a bottle of lavender-water in the other, and other appliances at reach.

"My dear young friend, where have you been?" he moaned. "This—ah—person is no doubt very kind," indicating the stranger by a motion of the lavender-bottle, "but I am unaccustomed to the services of a male nurse, and—and——"

The sufferer dropped the lemon, seized Jenny's hand, and held it to his brow, while the rejected nurse stepped respectfully back to make way for her attentions. A low gown floated across from the opposite room, and a weak voice murmured, "Jenny," in accents of harrowing reproach.

"What shall I do!" exclaimed the poor girl, as the plump, elderly hand of Mr. Bumble tightened on her shoulder with a detaining grasp. "Do please go, Mr. ——"

"Dacey," suggested the gentleman.

"Would you please go and put some more ice on Mrs. Webb's head. I will be there as soon as I can."

This state of things continued. Jenny had no rest. Groaning and calls from one cabin; calls and groaning from another. Neither of them would have Mr. Dacey: each was certain to "die" without Jenny.

"You will be worn out," said Mr. Dacey to her.

"I don't mind that, if I can only keep up myself. It serves to keep me from thinking of my vexation. My coming on this vessel and rounding Cape Horn has been an unfortunate mistake. I thought to have gone by the best and fleetest steamer."

"A sailing vessel is the pleasantest if you can spare the additional time."

"Well, the long voyage looks sadly formidable to me. I don't know what I shall do."

"Make the best of it," he said, smiling. "Perhaps I shall be able to help you in some way or other."

"I can only trust to heaven," thought Jenny.

An interminable hour seemed to pass. Mrs. Webb had her this five minutes, Mr. Bumble that. By-and-by the closeness, heat, and strange motion began to act strangely on Jenny. A swimming feeling seized her when she moved; her head throbbed, her eyes were hot and swollen, and she held by the wall to prevent herself from sinking down.

"How does he seem now?" kindly inquired Mr. Dacey at this point.

"I scarcely know," she replied faintly—"I am getting ill myself I fear. Oh, what a miserable state of things! I can hardly stand."

"Don't distress yourself about your father," said her new friend, earnestly. "I will do everything possible to make him comfortable; and your friend over there, too. Lie down at once and leave them to me."

"He is not my father!" whispered Jenny, falling into a seat.

"Not your father!" cried Mr. Dacey, in astonishment. "Oh I beg your pardon. I took up the impression that he was. Perhaps he is your uncle."

"No, he is nothing—to me. He is—Mrs. Webb's old friend."

Jenny spoke in a gasping kind of way. Her companion's surprise melted away into a quiet determination.

"Why, then," he exclaimed, "this is almost more than one could expect, my aged friend"—with a nod towards the green gentleman. "I shall be obliged to give you a little different treatment. Don't worry yourself about *either* of them," he added in an earnest tone to Jenny. "You go and lie down, and trust to me."

Jenny took the advice: and lay as still as she could during what seemed the most endless, wretched night she had ever known. Her deserted aunt, her expectant and disappointed sister, rose like staring ghosts before her again and again, every time more distractingly real; till, conscious of the fearful distance that was hourly swelling between them, she groaned in hopelessness and despair.

Morning came at last, and she rose with a wretched feeling in head and heart, and holding by the sides of her room—for the ship was heaving wildly—strove to make herself presentable, and hide as much as possible the tears she had been shedding. On reaching Mrs. Webb's room, she found that lady plunged into a state of hopeless apathy that startled her.

"Jenny, I came for your sake. If I die, bear my last words to William," was all that she murmured.

"Come for my sake!" thought Jenny. "Why surely her mind is wandering. She was coming herself before ever I was. But there's all the more need for me to do what I can for her."

Partly forgetting her misery in soothing the pillow of the one who had in idea so sacrificed herself for her, Jenny waited tenderly on her friend and made her as easy as was possible. One great thing was, that she herself was not so very ill. During the morning she was a witness of what appeared to be a conflict between the stranger and Mr. Bumble on the subject of a large tumbler of mustard and water. A mysterious gleam of enlivenment stole into the shadows of Jenny's mind as she watched the younger man resolutely follow the dodging head of his venerable charge, and finally penning it in the far corner of his berth, by main force pour the mixture down his throat. Gulpings, sputterings, and gaspings reached her ears, followed by cries for help and cries against such barbarity.

"Will you have some tea, miss?" asked the cabin boy.

"Yes; thank you," answered Jenny, almost cheerfully. "I think I could drink a cup. But I will give one to this sick lady first."

Mrs. Webb took it without hope, but without complaint; assuring Jenny

as she swallowed it, that she "blamed her for nothing: it was all over: but just to point out to William the spot in the sea where she was laid, and she would forgive the rest." Sitting down to her own tea with this on her conscience, and a general sense of loathing in her soul, Jenny's prospect of breakfasting was rather weak. A succession of something like brays broke upon her ear, followed by stifled expletives about "murder" and "poison" and "death at your door," which she discovered were the reproaches of Mr. Bumble to the stranger for the strong remedy he had administered.

In the course of a day or two, Jenny made acquaintance with the rest of the passengers. There were not many. Two French women, dark, thin, and cheerless looking, who never appeared without shawls, and the husband of one of them. A fat missionary clergyman named Blair; and a lady who called herself Madame Freep, but who was unmistakably English; and just as unmistakably *not* a lady. A large, black eyed, loud woman, who had not been ill at all, and who astonished the company by her extravagant dress—frilled petticoats, flounced gowns, ribbons, laces, and gorgeous jackets, all something wonderful to behold in the cabin of the *Lightning*. Jenny, she knew not why, instinctively shrunk from her—but Madame Freep was gracious in manner to everybody. Especially to the captain's brother—one Mr. Perkins: a seedy, rakish looking man, whom she seemed to have known before. Captain Perkins, though sufficiently civil, was silent and unsociable.

The days went on. Jenny and Mr. Dacey very much improved their acquaintance with one another. And by degrees Mrs. Webb and Mr. Bumble got over their mal de mer, and joined the circle; the latter first, for Mr. Dacey's mustard and water had really done him a world of good. But Mrs. Webb made much of her invalid state; indeed she was weak.

One morning when the sea was calm and blue, and the bright sunlight lay on it in patches, Mrs. Webb appeared on deck, shawls and cushions and all kinds of comfortable appliances borne before her by Mr. Dacey. For some little time she sat amid them like a piled-up caravan; and then she began to talk. To Jenny's astonishment and Mr. Dacey's private amusement, she quite ignored her past indisposition, and spoke rapturously of the "beauties of the ocean."

"For," she said, "although Jenny Morris has suffered a great deal, and I somewhat, I confess, though chiefly through anxiety for her, yet we must acknowledge that a sea voyage is something to be enjoyed; something to be positively revelled in."

"To be sure it is," replied Madame Freep, with a gushing air. "We do not give in to trifles. What is a day's squeamishness, more or less? We can bear it, I hope, Mrs. Webb. To whatever extent others may quail, you and I, my dear madam, can laugh at it."

"So we can," said Mrs. Webb, with a slight cough. She was immensely taken with Madame Freep and her grandeur.

"But," added Madame, turning to Jenny—who was staring at Mrs. Webb with wide-eyed surprise, "tell me about your friend, Miss Morris."

"Which friend?" asked Jenny.

"He who has just gone aft—Mr. Dacey. How long have you known him? Is he a cousin?"

"Known him!" echoed Jenny; "I never saw him in my life till we came on board this ship."

"Not know him before? Good heavens! Well, then, let me tell you—I am sure it has all arisen from your inexperience, my dear Miss Morris—that you and he are *too* intimate for strangers. I took you to be cousins, at least. It is quite improper."

Now, of all words in the wide range of language, that one conveyed the most ominous sound to Jenny's ears. Improper! Her spirit sunk before it; and being for the moment convinced that she had sinned against society, by innocently making friends with Mr. Dacey, she stood like a criminal, blushing, and looking a great deal too pretty to be pleasing to Madame.

Mrs. Webb, feeling herself in some degree responsible for Jenny's good behaviour, took up the grievance, reproaching Jenny in severe terms.

"He has been so very kind to me—to all of us," spoke Jenny at length, remembering all he had done. "I shall ever feel grateful to him."

"I am ashamed of you, Jenny Morris!" cried the scandalised Mrs. Webb. "He can't be a gentleman. If he were, he would not have thrust his company upon you when I was lying ill."

Jenny's good sense came to her. "I think it is all a fuss for nothing," she said. "What have I done—or what has Mr. Dacey done?"

"It seems to me the young lady is infatuated with Mr. Dacey," ill-naturedly spoke Mrs. Freep.

"Decidedly so," interrupted old Bumble, who was standing by. And Jenny at the moment hated him cordially.

Mr. Dacey came towards her as she sat, her face flushing indignantly, and her heart swelling beyond the possibility of quiet utterance. She returned his bow hastily, and, brushing past him, entered the cabin and shut herself in her own little room.

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie," she cried, apostrophizing her distant sister, "why did you ever marry Edward West, and then get ill! Oh, that I should ever live to be told that I was improper and infatuated!—and by a stupid, lumpy-headed old man, too!" It seemed really too much, and Jenny hid her head in her little berth and sobbed with all her heart.

The object of Mrs. Webb's censure, meanwhile, approached that lady in a polite-manner, in which suavity and quiet self-assurance mingled.

"You are looking brighter and brighter every hour, Mrs. Webb. Oh, this sea air is invigorating! And you, Mr. Bumble, I have not seen you before this morning. How are you?"

"Quite well," replied that amiable old man. "And so hungry! It's a great shame that there are no apples on board. I have been asking and find there are none. Of all things, I should like a nice apple or two."

"Why, really this seems fortunate," said Mr. Dacey. "There are no apples, I believe, on board, but a friend packed a barrel for me, which he assured me would keep well. I shall be most happy to supply you."

"I'm sure you are very good, sir," said old Bumble, rubbing his hands, for he was a gourmand.

Mrs. Webb was another. Her mouth began to water, and she said she could manage to eat an apple if it were baked. Amidst other omissions, Mr. Bumble had not put any private stores of delicacies on board for himself or for the two ladies.

Mr. Dacey caused some apples to be baked: and out of these refreshing cooked apples, a little breeze sprung up between Mrs. Webb and Jenny. Mrs. Webb was in her cabin, with an apple in a saucer, sprinkling some sugar on it before eating, when Jenny chanced to look in.

"What fine large apples!" she exclaimed. "I hope they will have some for dinner."

"No," said Mrs. Webb; "these were brought by Mr. Dacey. There are none on the ship, but his."

"What, did Mr. Dacey presume to offer you baked apples?" cried Jenny, pretending to look aghast. "But how came you to encourage his impertinence by receiving them?"

"Don't be nonsensical, Jenny," said Mrs. Webb, severely. "I am not a married woman of three or four years standing to be taught my duty by a girl like you. Thank heaven I can distinguish between sensible actions and silly attentions; and others might profit, if they wish to learn discretion from my example."

"Mrs. Webb, what do you mean? I have seen Mr. Dacey hold your head and bathe it with ice-water, and do everything in a man's power to be of use to you; and if those are silly attentions, and baked apples serious favours, it is beyond me to understand it."

"Jenny Morris, if you are going to be impertinent, I shall wash my hands of you. Be so good as leave me to myself, and shut my cabin-door."

Jenny retired: and taking some sewing, went out and found a seat on deck, hoping the fresh sea-breeze would clear her mind and blow the clouds away. At a little distance from her sat the large, overdressed lady, with the two Frenchwomen at her side. They were paying

assiduous court to her grandeur by admiring a brilliantly embroidered opera-cloak, which was thrown over her shoulders.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Miss Morris!" she said, blandly. "And how are you by this time, my dear?"

Jenny smiled, bowed her acknowledgments, but felt altogether too miserable to speak. Spreading her work on her lap, she was soon busy at it; and the others moved away.

"I am glad to see you able to think of yourself for a moment," said a voice at her side. It was Mr. Dacey's, and he leant over her with a book in his hand and an expression of thoughtful kindness in his face and manner.

"Bless me," thought Jenny, as she looked up when he spoke, "he is dreadfully young. As Mrs. Webb said to me, it's not the same thing as though he were a Mr. Bumble. I never thought about it before—but I'm sure he can't be more than five or six-and-twenty. And he is very good-looking too!—and as Mrs. Webb says, appearances must be all against me."

"I hope I have not offended you, Miss Morris. You are very silent."

"Oh, no indeed; I was just recalling how kind you have been, and how much you had relieved the misery of those two dreary weeks."

"I should like, without disclaiming the credit of the little you make so much of, to be always able to serve you in any way that may be possible, although it seems to offend Mrs. Webb and Madame Freep."

He had overheard, then! Jenny's face was in a painful glow. And yet he had lavished his apples upon them!

"May I say a word of warning to you, dear Miss Morris."

"Oh yes."

"Have as little to do as possible with that bedizened woman. I have my reasons for saying this. Had I a sister on board, she should not go within a yard of her."

"How can I help it?" asked Jenny. "I do not like her myself."

"You cannot entirely help it; I am aware of that. Had you a husband or father here he could take care of you. But—be as little with her as possible."

"Thank you," said Jenny.

The next day, Mrs. Webb having entirely recovered her serenity, remarked to Mr. Bumble, as they all sat together on deck, that "Mr. Dacey had some very delightful candied fruit, which he promised to bring to the table at dinner."

"He is a thoughtful young man, and deserves some credit," replied Mr. Bumble, while Jenny said nothing. The candied fruits were eaten, and a day or two more produced some Indian pickles, that were likewise disposed of; and in the ensuing fortnight several bottles of

cherry cordial: some sardines and boxes of figs and dates, followed in their wake. Indeed it seemed that Mr. Dacey had a most liberal private supply of good things.

But, in the course of time, so largely were these stores called upon for the public benefit, they came to an end. And with them came an end to Mr. Dacey's popularity.

The next to produce good things from private lockers, was Madame Freep. Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Webb paid more court to her than ever, deserting everybody else: Jenny sewed away at certain mysterious little packages of work she had purchased for Elsie, keeping herself very much alone. Mr. Dacey wandered up and down, looked into the sea, read, talked to Mr. Bumble, or played chess with the Frenchman.

One day as they sat together, Mrs. Webb, after clearing her throat once or twice, began, "My dear Jenny, may I ask why you act so morosely towards Mr. Dacey? I daresay you have hurt the young man's feelings, and he must certainly have some more of that delightful candied pineapple. I have a reason for thinking he *has*. If you did not mind asking him, my dear, I am sure he would be quite charmed to oblige you—and—and give us some."

"I have been forced to impose so much on Mr. Dacey's kindness," Jenny answered, her voice trembling as she strove to be calm, "that I should be sorry to increase the obligation by any such request. It would be very foolish."

"Foolish! what do you mean, you young Solomon?" exclaimed Mrs. Webb, talking loud and angrily. "Positively I consider you the most contrary girl I ever met. Here we are on a desolate voyage, where every little comfort we can get is needed to make it agreeable, and which Mr. Bumble and myself have struggled unceasingly to obtain, and yet you set up and tell me that the first effort that is required of you is foolish."

"Mr. Bumble should have seen that proper comforts were sent on board for us," replied Jenny.

"I am ashamed of you, Jenny Morris," said Mrs. Webb, virtuously indignant. "The poor dear old man has done his best."

Madame Freep approached; a silver knife in one hand, a pot of guava jelly in the other. "Just try this, dear Mrs. Webb," she said, smilingly. "It is so good! And I have a bottle of lemon syrup at your service, if you will accept it."

Jenny gathered up her work and moved away. She had not forgotten Mr. Dacey's caution. By-and-by, Mrs. Webb turned into Jenny's cabin, with the lemon syrup and a loose morning jacket all ribbons and rucheings, which she had borrowed of Madame Freep as a pattern for one for herself.

"I want you to help me cut it out, Jenny," said she. "Is it not beautiful?"

"It is very gay," was Jenny's answer. "But, Mrs. Webb, I wish to ask you to consider a little. Mr. Dacey particularly advised us to have nothing to do with this lady; who is, one may easily see, vulgarly overdressed, entirely uneducated, and—not nice in any way. Of course she is kind to offer you all these good things: but the receiving them from her establishes an intimacy that I am sure you will not wish to maintain long, and may be sorry for later."

Mrs. Webb listened coolly, and then opened the bottle of lemon syrup and mixed some with a glass of water. After a sip or two, she spoke calmly but severely. "Would your highly respected aunt, Jenny, who has been to you as a mother, believe that any man, not to mention a suspicious and ill-provided stranger (this was an allusion to the sudden collapse of his supply of dainties), could influence her erring niece in the short space of one month, as Mr. Dacey is influencing you?" Jenny bit her lips. "Even to the extent of falsifying and blackening the character of an elevated and generous woman?"

"But listen," cried Jenny, who was determined not to lose her temper, "just listen to reason. On the one hand is a little privation, hard to bear I allow, for the ship's provisions are not what they ought to be: but on the other is the necessity of being indebted to a strange and undesirable person—one whom perhaps Mr. Webb will not approve of."

"Now," exclaimed the virtuous wife of that absent gentleman, "now you have struck your last blow. Trying to make trouble between man and wife is a fitting end for these outer influences and base insinuations. Jane Morris, I defy you to poison Mr. Webb's mind against me, his loyal wife. My character, Miss Morris, is above your touch."

At this point Jenny burst out of the room and slammed the door. "We shall have a quarrel," she said, "I feel that we shall quarrel. I've slammed the door upon her, and that is a good step towards it. Oh, good heavens, that I should ever go round the Horn to California and fight all the way there?"

Affairs from that moment took a decided turn. Madame Freep, who seemed to have acquired undisputed power on board, and to wield it imperiously, ruling everybody to her own will — Madame Freep set her face against Jenny. Mr. Bumble bowed, smiled, and simpered to her, and received cup custards and potted meats in return; Mrs. Webb was her devoted admirer and fared likewise; but Jenny and Mr. Dacey, the first reserved, the last indifferent, were entirely overlooked. Jenny began to be treated with marked coldness, and when on deck would often overhear herself to be the object of most unpleasant and annoying remarks, especially from Madame Freep and Mrs. Webb. It dismayed her almost to fear. Even Mr. Bumble hardly condescended to speak to her.

One evening when it was intensely hot and the ship almost be-

calmed, Jenny wrapped a veil round her head and stole out for a moment, for the pure air on deck, before going to bed. Looking into the saloon, she saw the table occupied by a large card party, over which Madame Freep presided like one in her element: as she really was. Halting close to the bulwarks of the ship, Jenny leant her head against the rigging, and was surprised to hear voices just beyond; surprised because she had thought everybody was at cards. "I am sorry to be obliged to speak out plainly," said a voice she well knew, "but you force me to it by affecting not to understand me. I must say that your conduct is intolerable in exposing two respectable ladies to the society of a woman like that."

"My young friend,"—it was Mr. Bumble who replied—"you are really a little too warm. This lady, to whom you have taken so unaccountable an objection, is a very admirable person, very. She is under the escort and protection of the captain's brother."

"Well, by heavens, this is really too much. I will not stand by—I swear to you, I will not stand by and see that innocent young lady insulted by her. No; not if I have to unmask the Jezebel for it."

"Now compose yourself," gently interposed Mr. Bumble, as he disengaged his coat from the other's grasp. "That young woman, who has as much pride in her as Lucifer or the fallen angels, can take care of herself. She has acted a most ungrateful part to Mrs. Webb. Dear Mrs. Webb, at the earnest entreaties of the Morris family, took charge of the troublesome girl, and this is the result! I assure you she deeply regrets it."

Jenny's annoyance caused her to start, and she caught the eye of Mr. Dacey. His hand was clapped, not very gently, on old Bumble's lips. And Jenny, in her too hasty efforts to get away, fell over a coil of rope that lay on the deck, her foot somehow twisting itself amidst it. Mr. Dacey ran to raise her. Her ankle was hurt, and was in intense pain. Seating her on a stool that had been left out, he went to the saloon. Jenny overheard every word that passed there.

"Fallen down on deck and hurt her ankle!" repeated Mrs. Webb in answer to his hurried words, and his request that she should come.

"What a sad termination to a moonlight meeting!" exclaimed Madame Freep, with irony.

"Will you come out at once, and see to Miss Morris?" cried Mr. Dacey sharply to Mrs. Webb.

"Well, really, I hardly know about it," returned that lady, rising slowly and unwillingly. "If young persons in the position of Jenny Morris will be so indecently imprudent as to prowl the deck at night with gentlemen——"

Jenny forgot her injured ankle in the insult, and rose up alone. "Stand aside," she cried to Mrs. Webb in a storm of indignation, "you should not put a finger on me, madam, though I died in another

instant without your aid. You are a false, unkind woman ; yes, I dare to tell you so : and Heaven hears me say it."

Mr. Dacey, his whole frame heaving with anger and pity, caught the hapless girl and bore her to her cabin. Her poor face was scarlet with shame, and the scalding tears of distress began to trickle down.

"I shall attend upon you myself, Jenny," said Mr. Dacey, calling her by her Christian name for the first time.

"I wish it might be—but you know it must not," she answered amid her blinding tears.

"Listen, Jenny," said Mr. Dacey, standing before her with his arms folded. "It has been my intention for some time past not to lose sight of you until I could hand you over to your sister and Mr. West. They are my very good friends."

"Your friends !" exclaimed Jenny in amazement.

"Yes. And it was your likeness to Mrs. West that first attracted me to you. I have been cherishing a presumptuous hope, Jenny—that you will sometime be my wife. Oh, hear me, my darling, for I am serious. *I think that time has now come.* And I love you with my whole heart. You need a protector."

What did Jenny Morris say? Never a word. She was too bewildered. Too bewildered even to box his ears when he kissed her. But it took a long time to convince her that his arguments held reason, and they disputed it out. She, being a woman, had to yield, of course.

"Jenny, my life and soul," he fervently said, when it came to an end, "if I do not repay you for this by being a devoted husband, never trust me again. Mr. Blair is not the man I should have selected to make us one. But he's a minister of the Gospel, for all that, and we can't pick and choose under present circumstances. I think he may be trusted to keep the secret.

An hour later, when the ship was quiet and lights were put out in the private berths, the Rev. Mr. Blair went into the captain's state room. The captain was there waiting for him, and also Mr. Dacey and Jenny. A short ceremony was gone through, and then the party separately dispersed.

It was nearly a fortnight before Jenny walked on deck again. During that time neither Mrs. Webb nor Mr. Bumble ever approached her to inquire about her sprained ankle or offer her any aid. It was a fact, and a disgraceful one. Madame Freep incensed them both against her ; and they were entirely under Madame's dominion—for her sweets and other good things did not come to an end. Madame had, in fact, cast an admiring eye on the only good-looking man on board, Francis Dacey : and—there's a saying of Shakespeare's or somebody's, "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned."

Jenny, who did not seem to be made utterly miserable by the

general neglect, was sitting one day on deck, her foot on a rest. Mr. Dacey was reading to her. She and he seemed to be very good friends; but there was really nothing in the conduct of either that their enemies could make a mountain of. On this morning, however, he so far forgot his good manners as to call her "my dear," and Mrs. Webb overheard it. Up rose that lady with a sniff and a groan; cast a look of horror upon them, and sailed away from their contaminating presence.

Jenny's face was all aglow. She rose in excitement, and would have called back Mrs. Webb.

"Oh, Frank, pray tell her! I cannot endure that she should—oh, what shall I do?"

"Do!" exclaimed Mr. Dacey, coolly, "why, do nothing. Let people mind their own business, if they can."

That was impossible in Mrs. Webb's case, for she immediately called a meeting of her coadjutors, and represented the case. Poor Jenny! what glances met her at table! Madame Freep's was the worst: she seemed bent upon humiliating the distressed girl. And what might have come of it, or what Mr. Dacey might have done, cannot be known; for there broke out a violent storm that startled all other troubles away.

It was a terrible storm, a frightful, perilous gale: and it seemed to evince every disposition to stay and see the party round Cape Horn. Oh! how the wild wind howled through the bare rigging, and the black sea swelled to meet the leaden sky. No sun appeared for days—nothing to brighten the wide ocean but the foam that capped the waves. The cold and the ice were terrible. It seemed to be a fight for life. Only those who have rounded the Horn can know what it is. Private feuds lost their force in these dreary, short, cold days; nothing seemed of importance except exact latitude and longitude, and the supposed distance from the Cape.

At last there came a day when the desolate peaks of Staten Land rose like a group of ghastly giants from an ocean-grave before them, and then a good wind was announced. It seemed fierce and cold enough to them all, but it blew them round into the Pacific bravely. With a storm or two that sprang upon them like the angry remonstrance of that mighty ocean, they came up nobly with the beneficent trade-winds to aid them, and things began to go on smoothly again. So smoothly that the persecution of Jenny recommenced, and was setting-in pretty vigorously when it received another check in this wise.

They had been sailing for three long months, and more, and had never seen another ship; so when one was sighted, it caused quite a commotion. The *Lightning* was short of certain of her provisions, and it was hoped this ship might help them to some.

She proved to be an American craft, the *Eliza Jones*, also bound

San Francisco. The *Eliza Jones* was also short of stores; and she sent a boat off to the *Lightning* with two men in her.

They came on board, and they had much to tell of shortness of provisions and absence of comfort on their own vessel; averring that they had chiefly lived lately upon fruit—of which they had an abundance.

Now fruit was the very thing especially wanted on the *Lightning*: but tins of meat, which the *Eliza Jones* lacked, were there in abundance. An exchange was arranged. Tins and biscuit were given to the strangers, and one of the *Lightning's* boats, with a man or two in her and also Mr. Dacey, put off to the *Eliza Jones* to bring back the fruit. Sitting on the deck an hour afterwards, it struck Jenny that the sea was rising. She spoke of it to the first mate.

"Why yes, Miss Morris, it is," was the reply. "If it goes on that boat won't be able to come back again."

With a strange throbbing at the heart, Jenny sprang up and peered anxiously in the direction where the *Eliza Jones* had been. It was gone now, entirely gone; the tumultuous waves hid it: and the sea was getting worse with every minute. Somebody coolly said in her hearing that they had parted with the boat for good.

"Good heavens!" thought Jenny. "What shall I do?"

There was one thing before her, and she did it. Into her cabin she shut herself, and cried and prayed by turns. In her terror she feared that they might start to return, and not finding the ship, go beating about till they were lost. This almost deprived her of reason, and she spent a night in which she thought the misery of a lifetime was crowded. At daybreak, looking out, she heard some sailors laughing on the deck at the sudden change in quarters of their two shipmates. Their tones reassured her; they never mentioned danger, and she, as unconcernedly as she could, enquired of them whether they feared any.

"Danger! not a bit on't," was the rough and hearty answer.

Keeping up a quiet exterior, Jenny went in to breakfast as usual, and found, to her infinite surprise, looks of sympathy and condolence on every face. Mrs. Webb spoke to her for the first time since the night on which she had sprained her ankle. Her tone was not free from mild reproach, but it was studiously kind. "Take this chair, Miss Morris," she remarked, in the manner of one bestowing a boon; "and steward, bring Miss Morris some nice strong tea."

Mr. Bumble added to her consternation by dividing a slice of toast and handing it to her with a sigh.

But Madame Freep was the most ardent in her solicitude. "Take a little fish, young lady; you'd better eat what you can. I'm sure you need all you can get, for a miserable ship isn't the place to get the delicacies you should have."

This was remarkably reassuring, and Jenny received it with inward surprise and outward dignity: but when it transpired, as it presently did, that this sympathy was lavished on her in consideration of her heartless desertion by that deceiving wretch, Dacey,—indignation and laughter struggled for mastery in Jenny's face. The latter gained the day, and she broke out into a merry peal that rang in the saloon.

"Of course it was a planned thing," said Mrs. Webb; "a deep laid plot to get away from you, Jenny. Now that we are nearing San Francisco, he might be afraid that you would hold him to his attentions."

Another merry peal of laughter from Jenny. The ladies decided by private signs among themselves that it was "put on."

"Hysterics, poor thing," said Mrs. Webb, nodding confidentially. "I can feel for her as a Christian should, without regard to the past."

Day after day passed by, and the *Lightning* sailed on and on; but it was never crossed or overtaken by the *Eliza Jones*. They had been voyaging on the stormy deep for nearly four of the longest months Jenny had ever known, when something occurred to Madame Freep of a really startling nature. She had been gradually becoming nervous and irritable for some time past, and had followed the captain's brother on deck, and walked and talked to him there in an excited way.

One afternoon she left him in dreadful anger after an interview of this kind, and hurrying down the companion-way, past where Jenny and Mrs. Webb were sitting, cursed him loudly and in terrible language, as a deceitful villain. That night she took rather too much wine and worked herself into a fury. Mrs. Webb took refuge from the dreadful scene in Jenny's room. "Who would have thought it," she cried, "oh, who would have thought it? And yet do you know, Jenny, I remember warning Mr. Bumble, after we got to an end of that Muscat wine she had, that she seemed one to be doubted. Old Bumble is not as attentive to me as he might be, and he would not listen."

Disturbance reigned all night. Madame Freep, maddened and enraged, paraded the saloon with a pistol in her hand, like a female pirate, threatening to shoot Mr. Perkins. Daylight and unconsciousness overcame her valour, and she tumbled down in a heap during the scene of her valiant outbreaks. She was carried to her room; from whence she issued no more until the Golden Gate was entered and San Francisco lay in sight. What a breathless company gathered on deck to view it, as a bright sunshiny December morning disclosed it to their eyes! Jenny neither spoke nor moved. Her eyes were fixed on a boat that slowly approached them as they lay anchored out in the bay. It neared, came alongside, and bounding from it up the side of the vessel came two gentlemen, who scarcely had the grace to wait and assist a lady who accompanied them, and who was apparently as eager as they. At last she reached the deck and Jenny's arms the same instant. "Elsie,

Elsie, Elsie," was all that young lady could say, and straightway she fainted, as an appropriate ending to her voyage.

"Oh Jenny, love," cried her sister, "don't faint now! We have so much to tell you; and here is Mr. Dacey, who is Edward's best friend; and I want to introduce him to you."

Well, that really seemed a consideration of some weight with Jenny, for she immediately opened her eyes and sat up, leaning her head on her sister's shoulder. They were in the cabin, and Mrs. Webb was of the party; labouring assiduously to show her tender zeal, and to see what was going on.

"Your sister has seen me before," said Mr. Dacey. "There is no need of ceremony between us. In fact—she is my wife. Owing to the kind offices of Mrs. Webb and Mr. Bumble, to both of whom I shall always be the most grateful man alive, I found it necessary to interfere for Miss Morris's protection on board, and—the Reverend Mr. Blair married us in the presence of the captain."

"William Webb," screamed the lady alluded to, as a mild-looking man came glowering in and went peering round for someone. "William Webb, what have I not borne for your sake?" and sank upon his breast.

Mrs. West stood transfixed, as did her husband. Jenny, pale and abashed, allowed her proud young husband to link her arm within his.

"Married!" cried Mrs. West, when she found breath to speak. "Married on board this dreadful little ship! Oh! Jenny, what did you wear and who were your bridesmaids?"

"But how did you get *here*?" gasped Jenny to her husband.

"In the *Eliza Jones*. We made the Golden Gate last night."

"Come home," exclaimed Mr. West. "That's the only practical idea now. Come home, and let us try to think it out."

Down they got into the boat, and home they went in the carriage waiting for them. As they were alighting from it a remembrance struck Jenny.

"What on earth did I come to California for? And where's your illness gone, Elsie?"

Elsie laughed. "Why you see, Jenny, that imploring letter of mine was written ever so many months ago. And—here's the baby. Is he not a beauty?"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Jenny, bewildered. "I need never have come, after all. Or done what I did do in coming."

"Don't apologise, Jenny," laughed Mr. Dacey. "Human nature at sea is not human nature on shore."

A SAILOR'S WOOING.

A WELSH SKETCH. By ANNE BEALE.

"DEET to goodness, Shon *bach*, I cannot be marrying in such a hurry," said Nanno to her lover.

"Take me or leave me. Now or never. I'm off to sea again on Monday, and the *Mary Ann* won't wait," said ardent Jack—or as he was more mellifluously called amongst his native mountains, Shon Peregrine.

"Monday! I can't have my gown made by then! And what's to become of me when you're gone?"

Shon pushed his blue cap thoughtfully aside.

"You can stop on in your place. I shall be mate when I come back, and will get you a jolly little berth."

"When I marry I mean to be independent," said Nanno. "No more service for me."

"Your 'ladies' are as good as gold, Nanno."

"True for you, Shon," said Nanno, tossing her head proudly. "But when I marry I shall be my own mistress."

"Then you'd better take Morris Typicca. He's soft enough for anybody, and don't mind waiting. I do."

"Maybe I had. He's steady and 'ouldn't be saying 'now or never.' And he do keep a pretty little farm."

"Name o' goodness, marry him to-morrow, girl. I'm not the chap to stand in your way. God bless you all the same."

Shon took Nanno unexpectedly in his arms, gave her the hug of an affectionate bear, and was gone.

"Shon! Shon!" screamed Nanno—but the fine, black-eyed, blue clad lover did not return.

Nanno ran after him; in vain. She sat down under the trysting-tree, and began to cry her eyes out. The bright, coquettish, trimly-attired damsel gave herself up to temporary despair. But ladies-in-waiting have no time for desperation. Mistresses, however amiable, must be attended to, and the word "Nanno! Nanno!" resounded across the lawn. Stifling a sob and moistening a snow-white apron with brine, she ran into the house, as she had come out of it, by the back door.

Nanno was an orphan and a beauty, and, as such, she had resolved to make her own fortune. It was too provoking that just as she was accomplishing this end, her old playmate should have returned from sea, and so boisterously fallen in love with her. And he, only a sailor in a merchant vessel, while Morris Typicca was a well-to-do young farmer.

"He'll be back again on Sunday!" thought Nanno, as she sponged her eyes and put on a fresh apron.

But Shon Peregrine did not return; neither did he write. Indeed, he had told her that he hated writing, and seldom sent a letter, even to his mother. But he sent her his savings, which was, perhaps, more satisfactory.

Many comments were made on Nanno's red eyes; for no sooner were the lids recovering their whiteness than they inflamed again; and suggestions not altogether pleasant were also made concerning Shon's infidelity. She thrust them back with, "As if I'd be marrying a sailor!" and consoled herself with Morris Typicca, when she was assured that the *Mary Ann* had left Cardiff docks for the "World's End." She somewhat entangled in her mind this debateable spot with the Land's End, which she had heard at school "wasn't so far."

"Why aren't you marrying, girl? 'Tis time you were making a home for yourself, and you an orphan! There's Morris Typicca waiting these two years," said her friends.

"I'm not wanting to marry. I like my situation best," was her reply.

But Morris Typicca pressed his suit, and Nanno, like many another girl, was perplexed in her mind. The truth was that she could not forget Shon. Whenever a storm shook the giant oaks of the surrounding woods, and growled and groaned amongst the hills, her spirit was on the sea, with brave, gallant, loving Shon. And he was always on the brink of a watery grave; always wrecked or wretched; always thinking of her. Women are sadly vain, and flatter themselves their lovers are constant when their hearts are literally "at sea." And inconstant, coquettish Nanno quite believed in Shon's constancy, albeit she was in continual ferment over the addresses of Morris Typicca, and other admiring swains.

But as three years went by, and no Shon appeared, her confidence diminished, and she began to credit the maliciously repeated assertions of Morris Typicca, that "As for those sailors, they have a wife everywhere;" a ubiquity that Nanno did not understand.

However, the hour arrived that comes to most of us, when she must decide her own fate. What a supreme hour it is, and what an unlucky decision we often make.

"You must say 'Yes' or 'No,' Nanno," said Morris Typicca. "I'll not be waiting any longer. My little house is ready, and we'll have a 'Bidding' to furnish it up, and you can take to the dairy now that Molly is leaving, and I shalln't be wanting to get another dairy-maid."

It will be seen that Morris Typicca was of thrifty mind.

"I thought you were wanting a wife and not a dairy-maid. Why, man, I'm parlour-maid here! But I'll be making up my mind by next Sunday," said Nanno.

She was a religious girl, and never went to bed without saying her prayers—so that night she knelt long in the moonlight, asking for

direction from the Father of the fatherless. When she got into bed she had a dream. Of course, she dreamed of the sea and a ship, for she generally did—but this was a peculiar dream. She saw Shon standing on the top of a tall mast, just like one of the acrobats at the travelling circus. The ship was rocking and rolling about like mad on big waves, and she was standing at the bottom of the mast, entreating Shon to descend. Just as she was stretching out her arms, in the agony of—nightmare, and he appeared to be about to jump into them, she awoke. But the dream decided her. Be it understood that she was sadly superstitious, and believed in all sorts of omens, in spite of the superior teaching of her ladies. Either Shon was dead and that was his spirit, or Shon was alive and coming back to her. How she worked out this contradictory problem I cannot say; but in either case, she was not going to be a dairy-maid, and so she told Morris Typicca. They had a stormy interview, which ended in her lover walking surlily one way and leaving her to return home alone. This was the first Sunday evening she had ever walked back from church or chapel unescorted, and it made her melancholy; although she was glad at heart to be rid of Morris Typicca.

"I wonder if it was his ghost?" she said with a shudder, as shadows flitted before her beneath the great trees, and she quickened her steps.

"Nanno!" said a voice.

She shrieked. It *was* his ghost.

"Nanno! Nanno!" was repeated, and she shrieked again. What a huge ghost it was! In another moment it was at her side, and she saw that it had a gold band round its cap.

"Are you married, Nanno?" it asked, in a great, deep voice.

"No! No!" she cried, and fainted from terror.

When she recovered, she was in the arms of this very substantial ghost, who was kissing her emphatically. It sounds very improper, but we daily hear of equally strange spiritual manifestations.

"Are you dead? Did you fall from the mast?" she asked, in perturbation.

"On the contrary, I'm at the top of the tree. I'm first mate, and shall be cap'en soon, and come home to marry you. Now or never."

It was Shon in the flesh; handsome Shon, actually in uniform, with splendid gold lace and gold buttons. Nanno was dazzled, and scarcely knew which to admire most, the eyes or the trappings. But she laid her pretty head shily on Shon's breast, and gave him to understand that she had never forgotten him, though she had only just dismissed Morris Typicca. He laughed a laugh that echoed through the woods.

"Bravo, Nanno! Then we'll be married at once. To-morrow or Tuesday at latest. Come and tell the ladies."

This was rapid work, but Nanno had had one lesson, and remem-

bered that it was "Take me or leave me; now or never;" so she obeyed.

"Impossible," said the ladies.

"Thursday at latest," cried Shon. "I'm going in for my master's examination Friday."

Monday morning he was off by train.

"How slow she is. I'd run the *Mary Ann* against her," he exclaimed.

Still she, the train—why are all fast things feminine?—conveyed him eight miles in less than three quarters of an hour, stopping at every intermediate station. No sooner did they reach the market-town than he ran breathlessly up the steep hill—half a mile at least—till he reached a large house at the summit. He rang a big bell at the gates imperatively, and when a smart maid appeared, said,

"Is Dr. Matthias at home?"

"No, sir; he's gone out for the day, and won't be back till to-morrow morning."

Shon uttered a very impatient word; yet was not indifferent to the "sir," which was due to his handsome face and smart uniform.

"Good morning, miss," he said, politely, and ran down the hill again towards the station, muttering, "If I can't get it here, I can elsewhere. Parsons are never in their ship."

"Next train for Carmarthen?" he asked, when he arrived.

"Train just gone, sir. Another at 2.30."

Poor Shon used a naughty word, and began to pace the platform as if it were deck. He managed to console himself, nevertheless, with what he still called a "noggin" of ale, or so, until the appointed time; then tumbled into the train. He reached Carmarthen in about an hour, then took another running walk in double quick step, up and down hill and through many streets, till he arrived at a comfortable vicarage house, and again rang imperatively.

"Parson at home?"

"No, sir; gone to a clerical meeting. Won't be back till late."

"Dash my buttons if it ain't enough to worry a whale," cried Shon, rushing back to the station.

He was more fortunate this time, for a train was about to start.

"Llanelly?" he cried, frantically.

"Yes, sir. Change at ——"

"Never mind where. When are you off?"

"Directly, sir. Quick."

In rolled Shon. It was between five and six when they arrived at Llanelly. Here he was at home, for there were docks and shipping. But what were they to him at that supreme moment?

"Here mate! sixpence—a shilling to show me where the parson lives," he cried to a sailor lad.

"Which of 'em, cap'en?"

"Him as licenses!"

"That aint parson, but magistrate."

"Do as you're bid and show me the vicarage."

Once more in clerical quarters, Shon tossed the lad a shilling, and would have rung a third time imperatively, but there was no bell. He gave a heavy postman's double knock instead.

"Vicar at home, Miss?" he whispered, for his heart had grown faint with disappointment.

"No, sir. He's just gone out to dinner."

"Where? I'll fetch him."

"Impossible, sir. 'Tis a party in the country."

Shon was guilty of an oath, followed by, "Davy Jones himself 'ouldn't bear this."

But there was no redress. He had nothing more to do but to return crestfallen to Nanno.

"Can't wait after Thursday," he repeated.

"Impossible!" still said the ladies.

The next morning, Tuesday, he carried off Nanno, in spite of remonstrance, to the market-town. He caused such a whirlwind that the ladies believed the trees would fall. And they were so fond of Nanno that they were at their wits' end to know what was best for her. But a first mate! Captain Peregrine by courtesy!

Shon took Nanno, blushing a shower of roses, to the principal shop.

"Prettiest silk gown you've got, Mr. Thomas," he said.

"Yes, sir. Well to be sure—it isn't—it is—it isn't, Shon, of the *Mary Ann*?" said Mr. Thomas.

"Yes, but it is!" laughed Shon, shaking hands. "That's a fine silk, Nanno *fach*," pointing to a fabric of brilliant rose-colour, dotted with amber sprigs.

"I like this best," whispered Nanno, indicating shily a neat silver-grey.

"That's the sail-cloth, then!" cried Shon, and the wedding-dress was bought.

"Before the banns!" breathed Nanno. "And it takes three weeks for banns! What will people say?"

"That you are the prettiest girl in Wales—or Liverpool," replied Shon. "Now for the ring—no: we'll go to the parson first. I just want to speak to him."

Up the hill again, but not so fast as the previous day. Shon was too proud of his pretty Nanno to hurry her. The smart maid was an acquaintance of Nanno's, and was surprised and slightly scandalized to see her arm-in-arm with the gentleman in uniform of the previous day.

"I'll stay with Marget, Shon, while you go in," said Nanno, when they heard that the Doctor was at home.

"Deet, you'll come with me," said Shon, and they were conducted to the vicar.

"I want a marriage license, sir," said Shon.

"A what, Shon?" said puzzled Nanno.

"A guinea's worth to let us be married Thursday," said Shon, and procured it, with the clerical blessing.

"I shall never have my dress!" said Nanno, as soon as they left the vicarage. "And then to be married by license!"

"Ah! but you must! Come along to Miss Lewis, dressmaker."

They went, and Miss Lewis, like the ladies, said "Impossible."

"Come you, Miss Lewis *fach*," said Shon, with his winning smile, which displayed a wonderful set of white teeth, "I'll pay double: but we must have it to-morrow night."

"A dress in less than twenty-four hours! Impossible."

"Let all hands haul in and you'll do it!" said Shon, taking leave.

"Now, Nanno, last and least, the little bit o' gold wire."

"It certainly is 'Now or never,'" thought Nanno.

Blushing hurricanes of roses, Nanno was taken to the jeweller's, who being used to such matters, took no notice. It was pretty to see Shon's big, brown hands tenderly manipulating the "bit o' gold wire," and Nanno hiding, or reflecting her blushes, in the glass case whence it was taken.

"I've got a ring I made out of a nugget on purpose for you, Nanno *fach*. It will do for a keeper," said Shon.

"Go you away, while I buy my bonnet," whispered Nanno.

"I'll just be standing outside," replied Shon.

So the wedding gear was bought Tuesday, and, to the amazement of everybody, was sent home Wednesday night.

"What time we lose over our trousseaux," said the ladies.

"And *déjeûners*," they might have added, for they improvised the most perfect little breakfast in no time, at which they presided at ten o'clock on Thursday.

Before noon of that eventful day, Shon and Nanno were man and wife, and before midnight they were in Liverpool. In a few days he passed his examination for master, and became Captain Peregrine the following week, a command having been given him: and Nanno assumed the title of Mrs. Captain Peregrine, together with the motto of "Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing."

YEARS AFTER.

I never loved him ; for awhile
 We two were passing friends ; and yet
 I learned to prize the slow, sad smile
 Which touched his features when we met,

His words of greeting, light and brief,
 The clasp his fingers left on mine,
 And saw, with vague, unspoken grief,
 The signs which marked his life's decline.

And when, awaiting certain doom,
 He lay at last, serene and calm,
 I often sought his lonesome room,
 With flowers and words of friendly balm ;

And when I bathed his aching brow,
 Or read, or talked—still, all the while,
 His earnest eyes—they haunt me now—
 Repaid me with that slow, sad smile.

At last, one day, when gathering shades
 Made the spring landscape chill and drear.
 He said, "Dear friend, the sunshine fades ;
 To-morrow I shall not be here.

"And when you come, you will not see
 This trembling hand, this thinning face,
 So—you were always kind to me—
 Grant me, I pray, one gift of grace.

"I cannot reach you where you stand,
 Come closer, while I say good-bye,

Nay, closer—let me hold your hand,
 And kiss you once before I die."

Ah, why that sudden storm of tears ?
 I did not love him—wherefore then
 Would I have given all my years
 To bring him back to life again ?

And when, next morn, beside the door,
 I waited in the soft May rain,
 They told me he had gone before,
 And I had culled my flowers in vain.

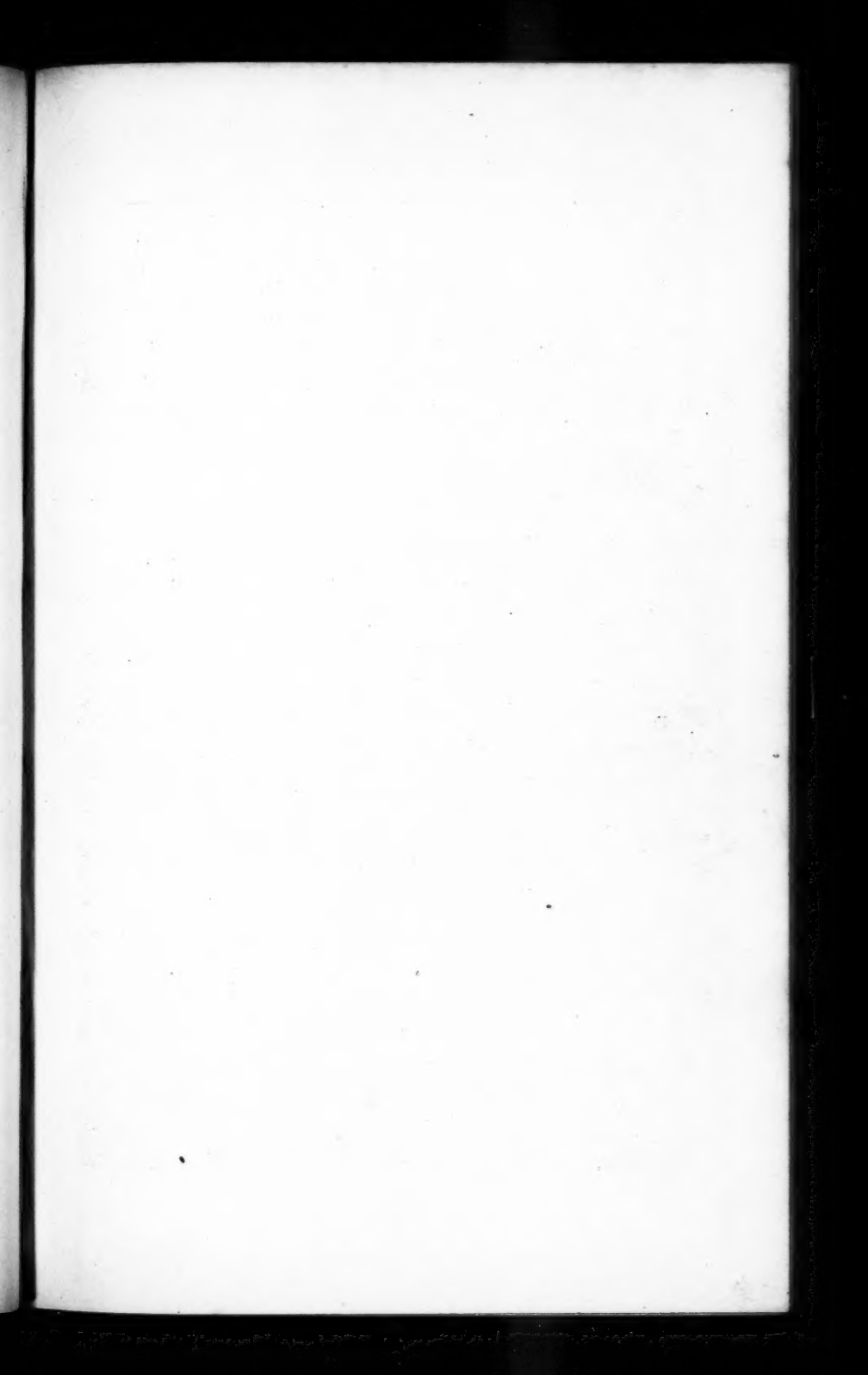
Ah, why, when half a score of years
 Across his low, green grave have moved,
 Do I bedew with bitter tears
 The grave of one I never loved ?

We were but casual friends, at best ;
 A word, a smile, and all was said ;
 I stood not near his heart, nor guessed
 That I should grieve if he were dead.

And yet, if on the earth there be
 One soul that holds me half so dear
 As his last blessing is to me,
 Or his sad memory, year by year,

It will be all I ask or crave,
 To smooth my bed or bless my sleep,
 Even though the whisper haunt my grave,
 "I did not love her—wherefore weep?"







A. HOPKINS.

J. SWAIN.

IN THE SHRUBBERY AT PINCOTE.